

All comments, suggestions and flames are welcomed.

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Book 1 – The Elixir of Life

Chapter 1

The boy who lived

Thant, the Blackshire Lord, was the next in line to succeed the Necromancer's Guild leadership. The current leader, Lord Cornelius, was lethally injured in the last battle with the vampires of Dakula, kinsmen of the legendary Lord Dracula, progenitor of the Vampire race.

Lord Cornelius had few days of life at most. In the very battle he was injured the vampires took away the most precious relic of the Necromancers – the Skeleton Transformer. Cornelius ordered Thant to retrieve it at all costs.

So Thant set out on a journey and soon tracked down the vampires. After an exhausting battle, Thant retrieved the artifact but on his way back he was ambushed. He was forced to apparate without direction and ended up, unconscious, in a forest near a human village, Godric's Hollow.

When Lord Thant regained consciousness that rainy early Monday evening our story starts; there was nothing to suggest that something horrid would soon happen.

"Where am I?" – Thant pondered while looking around.

He saw the dim lights of the village straight ahead. His eyes pierced through the growing darkness and recognized the silhouettes of the living humans. Usually the necromancers tried to avoid contact with the living and Thant was supposed to be no different but he did enjoy meeting them. However, tonight was not the best time for such an encounter. He had to return to the Necromancer's High Tower and put the Skeleton Transformer back.

Thant was about to depart when he sensed dark force within the village. The thread of the force occurrence was unusually strong. His first thought was of a dark wizard, a powerful dark wizard. And although dark wizards were not something unusual within the ranks of the wizards Thant wouldn't have been normally impressed. But this thread was different because the force emanating from it was darkly strong almost inhuman, which intrigued Thant.

He headed straight to the village. He had to see this wizard whoever he was. Even as a child he was always fascinated by strong forces – dark and light. He regarded them both with respect but his inclination was towards the light. Unfortunately his parents soon understood that they did not have a sibling welcoming and embracing only the necromancer's teachings but a sibling that had more compassion, honesty, kindness, pity and all other range of feelings natural for living humans, which was the reason for serious concerns. But Thant managed to grow beyond anyone's expectations and no matter of his rebellious at times behavior he was now due to succeed in the leadership of all Necromancers.

Thant entered Godric's Hollow. It was then when another force caught Thant's senses unprepared, a positive force of unseen degree. One no one of his kind has sensed for centuries.

Thant became extremely intrigued. He advanced toward the source of both forces dark and light. They were emanating from a neatly house with rain bushes in the middle of a dark street with the strange name – Godric Alley.

It was then when Thant sensed deaths, someone has just died. And then it all happened so quickly. A massive green light engulfed the house before it fell down in ruins. Thant was thrown on the ground so strong the blast was.

He stood up shortly after, dusting himself up and hurried towards the ruins. His spiritual duty was commanding him to find out what happened. He reached the ruins. He searched for anything that would tell him who lived here. And his eyes fell on a sign – Potter Manor.

Then as he was just about to leave he heard a voice. Actually it was a cry – a baby's cry. He turned around instantly, hastily searching through the ruins. And soon he saw a little thumb. Thant removed all

the rubbish of what was left of the walls surrounding the source of the cry. And then he saw it, a baby – a human baby of the living. There was nothing so abnormal about it except for a lightning shaped scar on his forehead.

The green light could have been caused by one and only one incantation, the worst of all. And to see that a baby of the living humans has survived seemed to say the least impossible. No one has ever survived it, no one except this baby.

Thant came out of his thoughts when his senses warned him of movement in the area – muggles, as wizards call them – the non-magic folk. He sensed as well in the distance dark forces. So he had to act quickly. He wrapped the baby in a blanket he found nearby and vacated the ruins.

Once in the darkness of the night, Thant pondered for a second what to do with the baby. Did he have any relatives or anyone that could take care of him? This Thant did not know. He only knew that he could not leave the boy alone waiting for someone to show up given that all dark wizards had followers. So it was risky leaving the boy alone. But to take a living human with him seemed equally unacceptable. Although this boy was most unusual! He was the boy who lived, the only human known now to survive. The other necromancers would certainly welcome the boy. So Thant made his decision to take the baby with him. Not only of the possibility of finding a way to stop the wretched curse that crippled the Necromancers but also a chance of bridging the distance between his kind and the wizards that was also crippled in the past twelve centuries.

But then another thought occurred in Thant's mind and it was to leave a note for those who might come looking for the boy, to let them know he is fine. But how to be sure that the one that had come was with good intentions? Well, Thant knew of a spell that would solve the problem. Although he was almost certain that those would not like the way it was done but there was no other choice. Thant could not risk the life of the baby.

Soon after Thant's departure, a giant figure appeared at the ruins of the house. It searched them thoroughly and found what it was looking for – a baby. This seemed to relieve the giant. Then another

figure appeared riding a motorcycle. The two spoke briefly then both disappeared.

The next day night, far from Godric's hollow in the Surrey Shire, a tabby cat was sitting still as a statue on a garden wall on four, Privet Drive. Its eyes were fixed on the far corner of the street as though waiting for something. The cat did not even move when a car door slammed nearby, or when several owls swooped over. In fact it was nearly two o'clock in the morning before the cat moved at all.

A man appeared on the corner of the street the cat had been watching so suddenly and silently you could have said he sprang out of the ground. The cat's eyes narrowed.

The man was tall, thin, and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak that swept the ground, and high-heeled, buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright, and sparkling behind half-moon spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked. This man's name was Albus Dumbledore.

Albus Dumbledore seemed busy rummaging in his clock, looking for something. But he did realize he was been watched, because he turned around and noticed the cat that was still staring at him from the other end of the street. However, for some reason, the sight of the cat seemed to amuse him. He chuckled and muttered, "I should have known!"

At last, he found what he was looking for in his inside pocket. It looked like a silver cigarette lighter. He flicked it open, held it up in the air, and clicked it. The nearest street lamp went out with a little pop. He clicked it again - the next lamp flickered into darkness. Twelve times he clicked the Put-Outer, until the only lights left on the whole street were two tiny pinpricks in the distance, which were the eyes of the cat watching him. If anyone looked out of their window now, they wouldn't be able to see anything happening down on the pavement. Dumbledore slipped the Put-Outer back inside his cloak and set off down the street toward number four, where he sat down on the wall next to the cat. He didn't look at it, but after a moment he spoke to it.

"Fancy seeing you here, Professor McGonagall."

He turned to smile at the cat, but it had gone. Instead he was smiling at a rather severe-looking woman who was wearing square glasses. She, too, was wearing a cloak, an emerald one. Her black hair was drawn into a tight bun. She looked distinctly ruffled.

"How did you know it was me?" – She asked promptly.

"My dear Professor, I've never seen a cat sit so stiffly."

"You'd be stiff if you'd been sitting on a brick wall all day." - Professor McGonagall replied.

"All day? When you could have been celebrating? I must have passed a dozen feasts and parties on my way here."

Professor McGonagall sniffed angrily.

"Oh yes, everyone's celebrating, all right!" – She said impatiently. "You'd think they'd to be a bit more careful, but no - even the Muggles have noticed something's going on. It was on their news. I heard it. Flocks of owls... shooting stars... Well, they're not completely stupid. Shooting stars down in Kent - I'll bet that was Daedalus Diggle. He never had much sense."

"You can't blame them." – Dumbledore said gently. "We've had precious little to celebrate for eleven years."

"I know that!" – Professor McGonagall said irritably. "But that's no reason to lose our heads. People are being downright careless, out on the streets in broad daylight, not even dressed in Muggle clothes, swapping rumors."

She threw a sharp, sideways glance at Dumbledore here, as though hoping he was going to tell her something, but he didn't, so she went on. "A fine thing it would be if, on the very day You Know-Who seems to have disappeared at last, the Muggles found out about us all. I suppose he really has gone, Dumbledore?"

"It certainly seems so!" – Dumbledore replied. "We have much to be thankful for. Would you care for a lemon drop?"

"A what?"

"A lemon drop. They're a kind of Muggle sweet I'm rather fond of."

"No, thank you!" – Professor McGonagall declined coldly, as though she didn't think this was the moment for lemon drops. "As I say, even if You-Know-Who has gone -"

"My dear Professor, surely a sensible person like you can call him by his name? All this 'You- Know-Who' nonsense - for eleven years I have been trying to persuade people to call him by his proper name: Voldemort."

Professor McGonagall flinched, but Dumbledore, who was unsticking two lemon drops, seemed not to notice. "It all gets so confusing if we keep saying 'You-Know-Who.' I have never seen any reason to be frightened of saying Voldemort's name."

"I know you haven't!" – Professor McGonagall remarked, sounding half exasperated, half admiring. "But you're different. Everyone knows you're the only one You-Know- oh, all right, Voldemort, was frightened of."

"You flatter me." – Dumbledore responded calmly. "Voldemort had powers I will never have."

"Only because you're too - well - noble to use them."

"It's lucky it's dark. I haven't blushed so much since Madam Pomfrey told me she liked my new earmuffs."

Professor McGonagall shot a sharp look at Dumbledore and said, "The owls are nothing next to the rumors that are flying around. You know what everyone's saying? About why he's disappeared? About what finally stopped him?"

Professor McGonagall had finally reached the point she was most anxious to discuss, the real reason she had been waiting on the wall all day, for as a cat nor as a woman had she fixed Dumbledore with such a piercing stare as she did now. It was plain that whatever "everyone" was saying, she was not going to believe it until Dumbledore told her it was true. Dumbledore, however, was choosing another lemon drop and did not answer.

"What they're saying..." – She pressed on."...is that last night Voldemort turned up in Godric's Hollow. He went to find the Potters. The rumor is that Lily and James Potter are - are - that they're - dead."

Dumbledore nodded. Professor McGonagall gasped. "Lily and James... I can't believe it... I didn't want to believe it... Oh, Albus..."

Dumbledore reached out and patted her on the shoulder. "I know... I know..." – He said heavily.

Professor McGonagall's voice trembled as she went on. "That's not all. They're saying he tried to kill the Potter's son, Harry. But – he couldn't. He couldn't kill that little boy. No one knows why, or how, but they're saying that when he couldn't kill Harry Potter, Voldemort's power somehow broke - and that's why he's gone.

Dumbledore nodded glumly.

"It's - it's true?" - Professor McGonagall faltered. "After all he's done... all the people he's killed... he couldn't kill a little boy? It's just astounding... of all the things to stop him... but how in the name of heaven did Harry survive?"

"We can only guess."- Dumbledore said. "We may never know."

Professor McGonagall pulled out a lace handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes beneath her spectacles. Dumbledore gave a great sniff as he took a golden watch from his pocket and examined it. It was a very odd watch. It had twelve hands but no numbers; instead, little planets were moving around the edge. It must have made sense to Dumbledore, though, because he put it back in his pocket and said, "Hagrid's late. I suppose it was he who told you I'd be here, by the way?"

"Yes!" – Professor McGonagall confirmed. "And I don't suppose you're going to tell me why you're here, of all places?"

"I've come to bring Harry to his aunt and uncle. They're the only family he has left now."

"You don't mean - you can't mean the people who live here?" – Professor McGonagall cried, jumping to her feet and pointing at

number four. "Dumbledore - you can't. I've been watching them all day. You couldn't find two people who are less like us. And they've got this son - I saw him kicking his mother all the way up the street, screaming for sweets. Harry Potter can't come and live here!"

"It's the best place for him!" – Dumbledore said firmly. "His aunt and uncle will be able to explain everything to him when he's older. I've written them a letter."

"A letter?" – Professor McGonagall repeated faintly, sitting back down on the wall. "Really, Dumbledore, you think you can explain all this in a letter? These people will never understand him! He'll be famous – a legend - I wouldn't be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter day in the future - there will be books written about Harry - every child in our world will know his name!"

"Exactly!" – Dumbledore said, looking very seriously over the top of his half-moon glasses. "It would be enough to turn any boy's head. Famous before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won't even remember! You see how much better off he'll be, growing up away from all that until he's ready to take it?"

Professor McGonagall opened her mouth, changed her mind, swallowed, and then said, "Yes - yes, you're right, of course. But how is the boy getting here, Dumbledore?" She eyed his cloak suddenly as though she thought he might be hiding Harry underneath it.

"Hagrid's bringing him."

"You think it - wise - to trust Hagrid with something as important as this?"

"I would trust Hagrid with my life." – Dumbledore said simply.

"I'm not saying he is not trust worthy," – Professor McGonagall said. "But you can't pretend he's not careless. He does tend to - what was that?"

A low rumbling sound had broken the silence around them. It grew steadily louder as they looked up and down the street for some sign of a headlight; it swelled to a roar as they both looked up at the sky



– and a huge motorcycle fell out of the air and landed on the road in front of them.

If the motorcycle was huge, it was nothing compared to the man sitting astride it. He was almost twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times as wide. He looked simply too big to be allowed, and so wild – long tangles of bushy black hair and beard hid most of his face. He had hands the size of trash can lids, and his feet in their leather boots were like baby dolphins. In his vast, muscular arms he was holding a bundle of blankets.

"Hagrid," – Dumbledore sounded relieved. "At last. And where did you get that motorcycle?"

"Borrowed it, Professor Dumbledore, sir," - The giant mumbled, climbing carefully off the motorcycle as he spoke. "Young Sirius Black lent it to me."

"No problems, were there?"

"No, sir - house was almost destroyed, but I've got him out before the Muggles started swarmin' around."

Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall bent forward over the bundle of blankets. Inside, just visible, was a baby boy, fast asleep. Under a tuft of jet-black hair over his forehead they could see a curiously shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning.

"Is that where..?" – Professor McGonagall whispered.

"Yes!" – Dumbledore. "He'll have that scar forever."

"Couldn't you do something about it, Dumbledore?"

"Even if I could, I wouldn't. And..." – Dumbledore stopped in the middle of the sentence as he had spotted something strange. The boy had opened his eyes – green like his mother's but the white part of his eyes were now glowing in scarlet red.

"What's this Albus?" –Professor McGonagall asked terrified.

"I'm not sure, Minerva." – Dumbledore replied cautiously.

And then all of sudden there was a bright blinding light. Hagrid cried out loudly, protecting his eyes, dropping the bundle of blankets. But the body of the boy remained in mid air. Dumbledore and McGonagall were watching speechless, as the body soon transformed into pale liquid light unveiling a letter that dropped gently on the ground.

Dumbledore picked up the letter and unfold it. The more he was reading the more he was frowning but then sighed with unwilling relief.

"What does it say, Albus?" – McGonagall asked getting out of the shock.

"It says..."– Dumbledore began. "...that Harry is in good hands."

That night the wizard community celebrated as it was the day of the fall of the greatest of all dark wizards. And they all raised their glasses in whisper: "For the boy who lived – Harry Potter".

A/N1: Disclaimer: Parts of the text have been borrowed from Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone beginning chapter but I don't pretend to own them in any way. It was just necessary for the beginning of the story. I have slightly modified them. I have left this chapter unchanged as I had intended so in the beginning.

Book 1 – The Elixir of Life

Chapters 2 through 10 have been revised (though they may go through further revision I decided to post them now)

Author's notes

Chapter 2:

A/N: The chapter has been revised. There are some subtle differences as you will notice. And also some suggested that Harry is not shown growing in a magic environment for which I'm sorry. This will change gradually. You will see and learn more of how Harry grew up along the way (I'll not have an entire chapter covering it because it's not relevant to the story that much but there will be flashbacks).

### Chapter 3:

A/N: This chapter is marked with a turn of an event – an event that is very important for Harry. It concerns the prophecy, which I have revised and made now much more important than last time. This prophecy changes everything for Harry and with time you'll understand why although it won't be so visibly apparent until the second year.

### Chapter 4:

A/N: As the title suggests, it is about Harry's wand. Last time I made it the same as the book but this time it will be different. I promise. Some wondered what wands do the Necromancers use – well you're about to find out. They are not very different from the wizard's but some have bonuses added to them. And Harry's wand is going to be something unique and unseen. It will play an important role though mostly at the end of the book and at the duel in the second is something also about a man with a turban in there, which is also interesting and will have a bearing later in the book.

### Chapter 5:

A/N: Here the changes are very minor. As you also know it is the chapter where I introduced the house elves of Solmyr castle. I had done so with a purpose that now will be apparent in the last chapters.

### Chapter 6:

A/N: Now in this chapter, there are only minor changes. But you will notice the little audacity of Cassie though it's not that much but still.

### Chapter 7 & 8:

A/N: Here, there are also minor changes.

### Chapter 9:

A/N: Here, the Capers make some reasonable assumptions that will lead to curious theories.

### Chapter 10:

A/N: I haven't changed much here besides the curios theories from the last chapter, which take new forms when the gang closes on the enigma.

I've gone so far. Expect the rest of the chapter covering the year in the next two weeks.

Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Book 1 – The Elixir of Life

### Chapter 2

#### The Dragon Anaconda

Nearly ten years had passed since Thant, the now lord of the Necromancers, arrived at the ruins of a house in Godric's Hollow drawn by the strong threads of light and dark forces where he found his now adoptive son. The sun rose above the black stoned medieval castle on the darkened green hills of Black Shire, the realm of the Necromancers. Its rays crept into a large hall where there were ragged carpets, rusty swords, shattered shields and ugly framed pictures. Only the increased amount of the dust was indicating how much time had past.

The framed pictures were portraying a majestic knight riding a black skeletal winged horse; a neat house with rain bushes in ruins and a great castle covered in a mysterious silvery fog. There were pictures of two beautiful dark haired girls wrapped in a hug collecting flowers with their mother, and playing on the grounds with their father. And Harry Potter was there too. He had pictures playing on the backyard with his sisters, riding a bicycle with Moandor, the castle's housekeeper, a snow ball fight with his adoptive father, cooking dinner with his adoptive mother.

All these pictures seemed to show a normal family where nothing unusual happened but this would not be true. It was not true because Thant was not a human though he was a wizard necromancer and so is his family. If you'd walk around the castle then you'd see portraits that move and talk with each other, clinking suits of armors, even flying carpets. Truthfully, it was a home of magic where around every corner there was always something that could surprise you.

Harry Potter, the boy who lived, found in this castle what he had lost – a family that loved him even though his adoptive mother was somewhat strict at times, and that Moandor, the castle keeper, was somewhat quiet and kept to himself. Thant on the other side was the exact opposite – always helpful, caring, showing love and buying gifts but not too much. He did not like to spoil his kids.

Harry was still in bed, which was not going to last as Saptienna came quickly to wake him up as she had seen what the time was.

"Nimbus!" – She shouted through the door. "Nimbus!" – But there was no answer as young Harry did not hear her.

Saptienna entered his chambers and flung open the windows letting the sunlight straight in Harry's sleeping face.

"Get up, sleepy." – She said softer this time. "What a shame? The Lord's son is still in bed. Up!"

"Just another thirty minutes." – Harry yawned in protest covering himself with the blanket.

"No, get up, now." – Saptienna said, pulling his blanket but Harry successfully resisted. "Nimbus, up..."

"Oh, please, let me be."

"Son, you will get up or I'll..."

"And then you will have to dry it." – Harry finished her sentence.

"Yes, but I'll be satisfied. Don't make me repeat."

"Yes, mother." – Harry sighed yawning. His hands stretched, he looked for his glasses, which were on the night desk. "What time is it?"

"It's almost ten o'clock." – Saptienna said while getting Harry's clothes. "Dress well, today is an important day for your sisters."

"Oh," – Harry groaned.

"What was that?"

"Nothing." – Harry smiled at his adoptive mother.

"Nothing, hey, I know this nothing of yours." – Saptienna said, smiling too. "It's the..."

"Inauguration day, yes, yes, I know." – Harry cut her off, a bit annoyed. "You've been repeating this for the past three years."

"Well, it's good that you remembered something." – Saptienna observed, slightly teasingly. "Your breakfast will be in the kitchen for another ten minutes after that in the dustbin."

Harry did not take this threat seriously. He knew she was saying this only to make him get up quicker. He stood up and went to wash up. His adoptive mother could be a real pain at times but he loved her nonetheless. She was caring, loving and very protective. Eight years ago they were attacked and Harry was blessed. He had lost a lot of blood and only Saptienna's timely intervention had saved his life.

But today was indeed special. It was the inauguration ceremony for his sisters. It was something like a sisterhood acceptance ceremony. For the last three years, his sisters have spent their time preparing, which of course did not go quietly. Harry hated when they started repetitions they drove him mad. But today it was going to be finally over.

Harry ready to comb his hair faced the mirror as it instantly shouted: 'It's a lost battle, dear'. Then he washed up, reached for the clothes Saptienna had prepared. They were as official as they could get though Harry couldn't really understand it as neither he nor Thant were allowed to see the real ceremony. But as Thant was saying traditions were traditions even if it was only for the farewell part.

Harry looked for his socks, which usually were under his bed for reasons that were beyond him anyway. He removed the few spiders that seemed to have found refuge inside. Harry had grown accustomed to them. They were everywhere in the castle. He often thought that Saptienna was keeping them as pets, at the very least there were no flies as the spiders were doing a fine job in eating them.

All dressed up, Harry left his chamber. He headed down the stone cold corridor and straight to the dining hall. His breakfast was served on silver platters at his favorite marble table near the fireplace, the hottest spot in the castle. Harry had thought that during the years he would develop immunity against the cold but it was a good dream.

"Nimbus, comb your hair." – Moandor barked instead of good morning. He always said that to him as Harry's hair indeed was every hairdresser's nightmare. Harry only smiled and started eating.

"Let him be, Moandor!" – Thant smiled. "This battle is definitely lost."

"Thant, why do I get the impression you told that mirror what to say?" – Harry asked while he was pouring pumpkin juice.

Thant smiled broadened but shook his head. "I don't need to tell the mirror something that is so evident."

"Yeah, sure!"

"Hey Nimbus!" – Xsi, one of his foster-sisters, said.

"Hey Xsi, Cassie – morning!" – Harry greeted. "All ready?"

"Oh, shut it!" – Cassie snapped jokingly. "Look at your own plate."

"That I am." – Harry said. "Just wishing you luck!" – Harry added teasingly.

Cassie turned red, clutched her fist and pointed it at Harry. "I'll get you for this, Nimbus."

Harry mentally kicked himself. Angering his sister was always a bad idea. His sisters enjoyed only few things and one of them was chasing Harry around the castle. They usually dressed as wraiths. There was one good thing that came out of it – Harry learnt all the passageways including the secret ones. Of course, with time, they couldn't catch him often. Harry didn't look it but he was very fast.

He thought it had something to do in growing up in this dark gloomy castle, but Harry had always been small and skinny for his age despite Saptienna's efforts. It seemed that he had high metabolism.

Harry had a thin face, knobby knees, black hair, and bright green eyes. But the only thing, Harry liked best in his appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead shaped like a bolt of lightning. He had had it as long as he could remember, and the first question he could ever remember asking Lady Saptienna was how he had gotten it. And she always answered.



"You are still too young to know but it was the night your parents were killed."

The reason for his parents' deaths was also a bit of taboo and had the same reasoning that he was too young. But Thant had promised that when he reaches the appropriate age he would tell him everything so Harry stopped asking. Though Harry, from time to time, has having odd dreams involving a bright, green flash and ice cold laughter but he never could figure out why. He had shared this with Cassie and Xsi and they speculated that those are memories that resurface in him. But he couldn't remember more.

Ah, Cassie and Xsi, his sisters, they were quite a thing. Cassie and Xsi were twins. They were born at the same time, some four days before him but they were giving him hell. Cassie was the tallest of the three with slender figure, straight jet-black hair, bright, piercing blue eyes, cub nose and very sweet cheeks. She had more Thant's features than Saptienna's. Xsi looked more like her mother. She had thin face and was just as tall as Harry, maybe an inch taller, supple figure, with curly dark hair, joyful and full of curiosity, dark-green eyes.

In this moment, a black feathered owl flew through the opened window depositing a letter on Saptienna's table. Saptienna unfolded the letter. She was frowning as her features sobered.

"Bad news, girls." – She said as she left the letter on the table. "The Inauguration ceremony will be postponed."

"YEAH!" – Both girls exclaimed happily.

"What are you celebrating for?" – Harry groaned frustrated. "Another failure, and more time of nagging for the year to come, yaks."

"Don't worry, Nimbus!" – Saptienna inserted as she picked up the letter to put in onto the shelves. "The ceremony is postponed not suspended."

"No!" – Cassie exclaimed disappointed.

"Well, it is a sign." – Thant sighed deeply.

"For what – total disaster?" – Harry asked.

"No," – Thant smiled. "It is a sign meaning that we can spend the day together."

"But I'll be with Lady Synca and Alamar." – Harry reminded.

"Sorry, Nimbus, you won't. Synca called early this morning. Alamar's ill so the visit is...I 'm sorry." – Saptienna said, patting him on the shoulder then gave him a kiss on the cheek.

"Great!" – Harry sighed. He was not thrilled to hear that. Spending time with his best friend Alamar was one of the greatest moments and one he was looking for this summer. It's not that he didn't have happy moments in the castle, oh no, he did. But it was the time when he was away from his crazy sisters.

"Well, we'll be together as I was saying." – Thant raised his voice to cancel out the noise Cassie and Xsi were making celebrating the postponement of their ceremony.

"So...what would we do?" – Saptienna asked.

"I thought taking the children out." – Thant replied.

"Where?"

"I don't know."

"How about the zoo?" – Moandor suggested with devious smile.  
"Maybe they'll feel at home there."

"What an excellent idea?" – Thant exclaimed jumping off his chair.  
"Go, and get ready."

"What!" – Both Harry and Saptienna exclaimed. They couldn't believe Thant was taking Moandor's advice seriously.

"The zoo, it is." – Thant said enthusiastically as he left the dinning hall.

Harry returned to his room to get rid of the clothes Saptienna had him put on and get into those he adored the so-called Muggle

clothes. Thant had spent the last five years explaining him and his sisters everything about the wizards and the Necromancers. And although Harry already knew that he was a wizard since they first told him when he was four, there were still things that fascinated him.

The next year, Thant had brought in a private tutor to teach Xsi, Cassie and him in the craft of wizardry. Cassie, the brilliant prodigy as Moandor called her some times, was excellent with potions. She was born to make them, eyes closed. Xsi, the diligent, was formidable with charms and weather incantations. And then there was Harry. He apparently was just as good in charms as he was in potions, which was frustrating and was annoying his sisters a lot. He had natural talent, when left alone of course.

An hour later, Harry and his family were already at the Leaky Cauldron. They arrived with something strangely called Floo Powder. It was as Harry discovered the most unpleasant way to travel as they usually traveled with the castle's thestals for those that could see them, of course, which were only Thant and Saptienna. But it was always fun to fly in midair without seeing what you were riding. Harry was always pleased with it as his sisters were quite scared, each time. It was one of things that Harry coped better with than them. Thant had approached the fire place and explained everyone what to do.

"Now, this is called Floo Powder. It is very simple to use. You take a pinch and you throw it into the fire. Like this." – Thant had taken a pinch from the glittering powder and thrown it into the fire. The fire roared before turning to emerald green. "Then you step in," – Thant had stepped in, "And you shout clearly your destination, which in our case is the Leaky Cauldron. Understood?"

Yeah, everyone did. So Thant had let Xsi first. She stepped in, shouted 'Leaky Cauldron' and vanished. Encouraged, Cassie had stepped next, and then Saptienna and Harry had been next.

The sensation had been like being sucked down a giant drain. The spinning had been fast, the roaring deafening. Harry had tried to keep his eyes opened but the whirl of green flames made him feel sick. Then he had had the sensation as though cold hands had been slapping his face and then hopefully it all stopped as Harry felt hard on his knees on the stone cold floor of the Leaky Cauldron.

Someone had helped him stood up. When he looked up, it was Cassie.

"Thanks." – He had said.

Lord Thant arrived last with a duster. After the dusting, they headed to a room upstairs so Saptienna and Thant could change into muggle clothes.

"Dear, have you taken muggle money with you?" – Saptienna asked as they entered the room.

"No, but I'll be going to Gringotts to take some." – Thant replied as he got into the muggle clothes. "You lot will stay here till I return." – And he went away.

"They have an exchange bureau there?" – Cassie asked regarding the wizard bank.

"Yes, sort of..." – Saptienna replied then added. "You'll see it next year."

Harry had been in London before. He was with Lady Synca and Alamar. They've went to the movies. Then they had gone to the Tower but this had its explanation. Lady Synca's castle was made mostly of towers and dungeons thus she fancied them a lot.

Thant returned shortly after with lots of money as though he was planning to buy half London. Thant's family was extremely rich. Thant had also accumulated substantial wealth on his own so now he was ridiculously rich. However, his wealth had nothing to do with his way of life. Thant had taught his children to be humble and respectful no matter how rich a person is. For as, he had said no matter how rich a man is if he does not have friends then he has nothing. Hopefully this had no influence on the behavior of his siblings.

So they headed to the zoo, which was not very far, at least according to Thant. They arrived there by three o'clock. The zoo was very crowded as it was a very sunny Sunday. They passed by a van selling ice creams and Thant bought all the largest and most chocolate ones except for Harry who took the largest vanilla one, which was his favorite.

The afternoon was great and still no disaster. Harry was prompt of making things happen occasionally as he still had not got the hold of his magic power. There was one time, which besides being very funny, had shown him how little control he had over his power. He had managed to transform his sisters into pigs with wings as they had, yet again, chased him throughout the castle. His parents weren't mad at him. Actually, they had to suppress hard the laughter as the situation had been very comic one.

It was a happy time for Harry. Harry was very careful to walk just a little away from Xsi and Cassie who were starting to get bored with the animals by teatime, and so not to fall back on their favorite hobby of chasing him around. They ate in the zoo restaurant. Harry had cherry pie, English tea with hot milk and again vanilla ice-cream.

After that they headed to the reptile house. It was cool and dark there, with lit windows all along the walls. Behind the glass, all sorts of snakes and lizards were slithering and crawling over beds of wood or stone. Of course, his sisters wanted to see the hugest and most dangerous snakes and lizards. Soon enough they found the biggest one in the house. It could have wrapped its body around the family crypt at least one and half times and shatter it to dust but for the moment it did not look in the mood. Actually, it was probably sleeping.

Xsi and Cassie stood against the glass hoping to see it move but it didn't. Xsi turned to Cassie. "Make it move, please."

"Do I look like a snake master to you?" – Cassie said.

"No, but you could try." – Xsi smiled.

"Yeah, right." – Cassie shrugged. "Make it move yourself." – And she strode off.

Xsi sighed and tried but the snake looked quite asleep so she moved away. Harry, on the other hand, approached the display. He looked intently at the snake. He imagined that it must be really tiresome having so much people disturbing you all day while drumming with fingers on the glass.

Suddenly the snake opened its beady eyes. Slowly, very slowly, it raised its head until its eyes were at the same level as Harry's. And it winked. Harry stared stunned. Then he looked around quickly to see if anyone was watching. They weren't. He looked back at the snake and winked too. But this wasn't true entirely. Thant had seen the sudden move of the snake and stared. He soon touched Saptienna on the shoulder and directed silently her gaze to Harry and the snake.

In the meantime, the snake made a move that clearly described annoyance.

"It's like that all day." – Harry could have sworn of hearing the snake speaking to him.

"I know." – Harry muttered through the glass although he wasn't sure the snake could hear him. "It must be really annoying."

"Indeed." – The snake nodded.

"Where do you come from?" – Harry asked interested.

The snake simply jerked its head in the direction of a little sign on the wall that said – Dragon Anaconda – Amazon River.

"Was it nice there?"

The snake shook its head and hissed. "I was held here in captivity, shortly after my birth."

"Oh, I see so you do not remember your birth place." – The snake nodded again.

It was in this moment that Cassie and Xsi had spotted the odd behavior of the snake. They stared blankly but approached jealous of curiosity. And accidentally, Xsi pushed Harry aside as they were quite enthusiastic. Caught by surprise, he fell hard on the concrete floor. What happened next was so fast that no one saw how it happened – one second Xsi and Cassie were leaning right up close to the glass, the next, they had fallen into the tank of the snake with howls of surprise and were soaked with water.

Harry sitting up gasped, as the glass front of the snake tank had vanished. The great snake uncoiled itself very fast, slithering onto the floor. People throughout the reptile house screamed and started running for the exits.

The snake stopped by Harry and he distinctly heard it say or hiss – "I'm grateful for your help. I am Prince Athreese Vires. I shall name you Dr'Anacond Master and all of my kind will help you at anytime. Amasson, here I come." – Then the snake swiftly slid past by him.

The keeper of the reptile house was in shock.

"But the glasses..." – He kept saying. "...where did the glasses go?"

Harry looked up at the keeper trying to understand why he was saying glasses instead of glass. He then noticed stunningly that all glasses in front of all tanks were also missing. And all reptiles were crawling or slithering out of the building. He also had the impression that subtle hissing voices were thanking him although he could have easily imagined them.

Thant and Saptienna had been watching since Vires started speaking with Harry but what had happened next was indeed a bit shocking. The ever cool Thant reacted quickly. He stunned the keeper and the few muggles still inside the building, then rearranged their memories. Thant replaced all the missing glasses. He took Harry by the hand while Saptienna took the girls'. They all exited the reptile house as fashionably and as quickly as possible.

The keeper of the reptile house even wished them "Merry Christmas." But this was a normal side effect of the memory charm when someone had to forget something as stunning as this or maybe it was because Thant had forced it a bit.

"Back to the castle." – Thant said.

"I think it'd be best if we disapparate, honey." – Saptienna suggested.

"I agree. Take Xsi and Cassie, I'll take Harry." – Thant agreed.

Ten minutes later, they appeared near their castle, as Thant had put numerous defense charms most of which preventing apparition inside the castle grounds. They quickly entered in. Saptienna took

the girls to their rooms to change into dry clothes while Thant left Harry in the master's room.

Harry was a little confused. Actually he was very confused. He had expected his foster parents to be mad at him as he had used magic outside of the castle but instead they were mainly shocked and looking proud but for what reason Harry had no idea. And before Harry could begin to comprehend their behavior, Moandor busted in with his wheeled table full of all kind of delicacies. He placed them on a big table that appeared out of nowhere. He placed four silver chairs. Then he smiled at him big time and left the room. Few seconds later, he returned with some of the most precious jewelry of Thant's family along with many clothes. He put them on the master's bed and left again.

Now, Harry was even more confused and perplexed. 'What was going on?' Harry asked himself. The answer came soon after...

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven



## Chapter 3

### The Prophecy

The escape of the dragon anaconda marked Harry with the most unbelievable turn in his entire life he had yet to comprehend. . Shortly after Moandor had left him in the master's room with the family heirlooms, Lord Thant had come in. He had made Harry dress up with the official attire of Thant's family. He was as Thant had repeated a billion times the lord's son, the Prince of Blackshire. Harry had obeyed although he had had at least a dozen questions he was dying to ask at that moment starting with 'what's going on'. Then Thant dressed in the attire he used to appear on official meetings.

"Good, now you are ready." – Thant had said seeing him all dressed up.

"Ready for what?" – Harry had asked hoping this time for straight answer.

"You're ready to take your place in the world. Today for the first time, you have uncovered one of your extraordinary abilities." – Thant had replied with pride in his voice. Then he looked seriously at him and added. "But...do not get too overconfident of this achievement. You still have a long way to go. "

Harry had looked bemused at Thant. He had absolutely no idea what he was talking about. "I don't understand. What achievement?"

"You will learn soon enough." – Thant had answered. "Take your place here beside me."

Harry had obeyed and stood right next to Thant. Some time later, the door of the room had opened and Ladies Saptienna, Sephinroth and Ash had entered. They were followed by Xsi and Cassie. They were all dressed with the family's official attires.

"The day has come." – Thant had begun. "The day, the Necromancers were waiting for the past four hundred years; one of the many though but still one of the most important days in your life, Harry. Remember, our society rarely accepts in its ranks wizards or let alone muggles.

Four hundred years ago, the Necromancers lost their greatest leader – Lord Haart. Since this loss, we were never the same. We lost him in one of the biggest battles of all times. The balance of our society was lost and the Vampires and the wizards overwhelmed us. And ever since, we went into hiding as they were chasing us all over the world.

Eventually, we found ways to conceal our identities though it was not enough. The vampires could still find us. We established four kingdoms all governed by the Necromancers' High Council. Each kingdom had its own ruler until one by one they fell. Actually, only our domain remained. But we hid into the Blackshire Hills, which became taboo for all wizards. They never dared, ever since, to bother us here. Even the vampires are afraid to come. This, of course, does not impede them of launching attacks from time to time. I guess just to annoy us.

After, Lord Haart's death, a seer – Sandrile made a prophecy. He said: 'On the dying of the seventh month shall be born the one who will unite all Necromancers under the banner of Mortis and Gallean. The one shall not be of Necromancer's descent he will be of the living. A week before his eleventh birthday, he shall meet the heir of the Dr'Anacond and set him free. He will speak the Ancient tongues – the sacred language of the Elder Dragons, the spiritual language of the Dr'Anacond, and the mysterious tongue of the Elder Snakes, - the most powerful of the magical creatures. You will know him by the lightening scar on his forehead left by the breath of Death.

He will be fulfilling the prophecy of the living too: On the dying of the seventh month, shall be born the one with power to vanquish the Dark Lord. He shall have a power the Dark Lord knows not. His parents shall be those that have fought him trice and escaped while the Dark Lord shall mark him as equal. Neither shall live as long as the other is alive.

The one shall be granted the power of Mortis and Gallean, and shall be known as the Prince of the Necromancers, the lord of Blackshire.'

At this moment, Harry stood totally baffled and speechless. He was unable to speak for several minutes. This particular moment had been foretold nearly four hundred years ago. However, Harry had no

idea what the implications would be. He never wanted to be the center of attention let alone the prince of all Necromancers. He had thought of his title more like of a ceremonial title than something real (after all they were living in the 20th century not in the Medieval Ages).

"What do...es thisss mean?" – Harry had asked stuttering after regaining his speech.

"It means, my dear boy, that you're the lord of all Necromancers. It was foretold four hundred years ago by the greatest seer of all times, a seer that has never been wrong. You have made the first step. Your parents were wizards and they have fought with the Dark Lord Voldemort trice and escaped."

"I still don't understand."

"You always wanted to know how your parents died and why. Well, now I can answer your questions as much as I can, of course. It is not because I'll be withholding information but because my knowledge is limited. Eleven years ago, Voldemort, the resident dark lord, was wrecking havoc and mayhem throughout the wizard world. Just a year before you're born, a seer of the living, a wizard seer made a prophecy proclaiming that one that will vanquish this dark lord will be born at the end of July. He will have a power the dark lord knows not. His parents would have fought him trice. And the dark lord himself shall mark him as equal, for neither can live as long as the other is alive. The Dark Lord chose you, Harry.

The lightening scar on your forehead is the result of the incomplete killing curse. So I assume he struck you with the death curse but the curse was reflected, and instead of killing you it hit him. And his power was broken. As far as I know your mother gave her life to protect yours.

However, all these events were foretold four hundred years ago by Sandrile. He foresaw that the recent prophecy shall be made by the living. And that you will release the heir of the Dr'Anacond from his prison a week before your eleventh birthday, which you did. It also means that in time, Galleon and Mortis shall grant you their power. And..."

"Who is Galleon and who Mortis?" – Harry interrupted.

"Gallean is said to be the husband of Mortis, the Necromancers' Goddess, and the Goddess of Death. It is also said that Gallean might be the God of the Elves."

"Dad, you mean of the house elves?" – Cassie asked.

"No, of all elves."

"But there are no other." – Xsi interjected.

"Yes, there are. But they have decided to hide just as much as we do. The house elves are their very distant cousins." – Saptienna cut in.

"And also, Harry, you have spoken the language of the Dr'Anacond." – Thant added.

"How do you know?" – Harry inquired.

"And the snakes thanked you too." – Saptienna also added.

"How do I know? Well, your mother and I speak parsletongue – the language of the snakes so we understood when they were thanking you. Now, we didn't understand what the Dr'Anacond told you but you were clearly speaking with him." – Thant patiently explained.

"But how did you know he is the heir of the Dr'Anacond if don't speak their language?"

"Ah, I don't know if you noticed I imagined you didn't." – Thant said. "The Dr'Anaconds are of the few that can use magic. The moment you released him, and after he passed by you, he did not slid off the reptile house. He vanished – he disappeared."

"I don't understand."

"He used magic to disappear."

"But if he can use magic why didn't he disappear before?" – Xsi asked.

"He didn't because he was trapped. It might have looked like a usual glass to you all but it wasn't. The Muggles had not clue. For many years, many were trying to free him none has ever succeeded. The Dr'Anacond Heir was trapped and held in his prison by powerful magic, one that can only be broken by the one who has the power and that one is Harry."

"What?" – Harry exclaimed. "What power – I don't have it."

"Harry, son, it was foretold four hundred years ago." – Saptienna cut in. "Sandrile foresaw that you shall be the one that will break the spell guarding the Heir of the Dr'Anacond."

"So it's something like the legend of Excalibur?" – Cassie inquired.

"Yes, something like it." – Thant replied.

"But I don't want to be the Prince of the Necromancers." – Harry then said.

"I imagine not." – Saptienna teased.

"What's that supposed to mean?" – Harry heated up not knowing even he bothered.

"Well, you always give up."

"That's not true." – Harry objected.

"Good, you see you are coming back to your senses." – Saptienna said smiling. Harry did not answer because he finally got her ruse. She tricked him into heating up. She had a talent for this.

"But..." – Harry tried to object.

"Harry, in time, you will come to terms with this new reality. Sandrile foresaw rightly. It will happen one step at a time." – Thant cut his efforts off, all beaming of joy and pride. Ten years ago, he made the right choice.

"For now," – Saptienna interjected. "Let's enjoy this little feast."

"Alright." – Harry ceded, sighing deeply. He couldn't fight them. He never could.

Thant had seated him and his foster-sisters on the grand table with the silver chairs while Saptienna, Ash and Sephinroth were seated at another smaller table near the window that had appeared also out of thin air. Lord Thant was the one serving them all which was a bit awkward, as this was usually Moandor's job.

With time, Harry did come to terms with Sandrile's prophecy. But for now, he decided not to fight it, much. The feast was delicious but most of all he was happy. He now knew what had happened to his real parents though he did not know all the details. Why the Dark Lord chose him? This might be the question that probably would never be answered. What did his parents do for living? He had many questions like that in his mind but he knew Thant was telling the truth that his knowledge was limited. Maybe there was someone among the wizards that knew the answers and he intended to find him.

Harry now had new thoughts. He wanted to learn everything he could before going to school. He wanted to learn the Necromancer's way fully. Being a prince and not knowing their way was to say the least inappropriate. He had to know everything or as much an almost eleven old boy could learn. And Thant, of course, abided.

At the day of Xsi and Cassie's birthday, which were four days before Harry's, the council of the Necromancers arrived in the castle. Thant had hoped they would assist in the inauguration ceremony for Xsi and Cassie, which was to be a day before Harry's birthday. The council also wanted to personally welcome Harry into the Necromancer's community. This ceremony is usually done when a boy reaches the age of first maturity, as they call it. But the occasion now was different. It was to celebrate the fulfillment of the first step of the prophecy. Thant and Harry were to collect a special flower that the Necromancers call a forget-me-not-now. It's a rare flower that grows in the dark caves southeast of Blackshire hills.

Harry and Thant arrived at the caves by noon. Thant had brought two white torches.

"Come on, Nimbus. Take this one." – Thant said passing one torch to Harry.

"How does this flower look like?" – Harry asked while taking the torch.

"Its leaves are magenta and yellow but on the light of a white torch it glows." – Thant replied.

"Why does it glow?"

"I don't know but it does."

The light of the white torches was dancing on the walls creating ghostly images every time it passed lichens or coves. It was like they were in the underworld, a place totally different from the rest of the world. There were stalactites and stalagmites of all sizes and shapes. They were the result of the work of the underground rivers. And on the light of the torches those marvel creations were shining in all the colors of the spectrum.

Harry took off his gaze of the marvels and started looking down searching for the flowers. And what Thant had not told him that it was he who had to look for the flowers, alone. And soon, Harry noticed the absence of Thant. He was left alone. Fortunately this was not the first time so Harry was used to it, besides leaving in a dim and sometimes dark castle was now very helpful. His eyes got accustomed to the darkness quickly, as his torch neared the end of its life. Then Harry threw it away.

Harry continued slowly ahead feeling his way. And then after ten minutes, he noticed something growing on the cave floor. He bent down and picked it up. It was some kind of flower. But it was not what he was looking for. He dropped the plant and moved on.

After several hundred feet, the cave expanded to a large open space. Its ceiling was so high that Harry could not see it though he could clearly see lights gleaming like stars on the night sky. On the far end, Harry saw another marvel of nature – gems and crystals glimmering with a light of their own. And among them Harry saw the flowers he was looking for. As Harry approached the glimmering had turned into blinding light so intense that he had to close his eyes.

"Reaching those flowers is not as easy as it seemed." – Harry said to himself. "But I'm gonna take them."

Harry turned around thus facing the intense light with his back then started moving backwards till his eyes got used to the light. He then turned around, bent down and picked up several of the plants – magenta and yellow colored – the forget-me-not-now. He noticed how soft they were by touch and loved them on sight.

He then made his way back to the entrance of the cave. Thant was probably waiting for him there. And the way back was faster than the way in. Somehow he could see clearly his path as though he had left luminous tracks.

And Thant was indeed there. He was pleasantly surprised to see Harry come back so quickly with the flowers in his hand. The pride was obvious in his eyes.

"You're back?"

"Yes." – Harry replied.

"Good. Let's go back to the castle." – Thant said.

They arrived back in the castle just for the afternoon tea. Thant left Harry with his sisters and headed to the northeast tower to leave the flowers. Cassie and Xsi took Harry for as they said a surprise. Harry has learnt through personal experience that the surprises of his sisters were always unpleasant; after all they were the family's pranksters.

"Where are you taking me?" – Harry asked cautiously.

"Don't be hasty." – Xsi replied.

"You'll see." – Cassie said.

They have blinded his eyes so he could not have the possibility to see but Harry could clearly rely on his other senses. He sensed that they passed through at least four of the secret passages of the southwest tower, which meant that they were heading towards the playing hall – the place where Thant was holding most of his



medieval collection of armament. But his sisters had something else in mind.

When they arrived near the hall they stopped. Cassie then made Harry spin around himself then took him by the hand. They walked for nearly twenty minutes. From the spinning Harry's head was turning so he had no idea where they were heading. Suddenly they stopped.

"So what now?" – Harry asked.

But there was no answer because Cassie and Xsi had left the room. Harry took off his blinder and saw that he was in his room.

"How do they do that?" – Harry pondered.

He then tried to guess what the purpose, the idea of their prank was but nothing came to mind. Then Harry saw a note on his bed that said: "Open the wardrobe." Harry pondered for a moment then approached slowly and carefully the wardrobe. He gently opened it. There was a light and a sound that almost deafened him.

"Surprise, Harry." – A familiar voice shouted.

Harry opened his eyes and saw a boy at his age laughing. He was wearing dark magenta cloak, black boots and green robes. This boy's name was Alamar Darkstone – Harry's best friend.

"Alamar, did you have to deafen me?" – Harry asked rubbing his ears.

"Nice to see you too."- Alamar said instead of answering.

"Yes, it is nice to see you too, my friend. When did you arrive?"

"About five minutes ago." – Alamar replied, and quickly added: "In your wardrobe, I mean."

"Ah, I see – my sisters." – Harry said suddenly struck by epiphany.

"Yes, devious ones they are." – Alamar confirmed.

"Yes very and always on my account." – Harry said.

"That's because we love you so much." – Xsi said while entering.

"Have someone chase you all night dressed like a wraith when you are five years old then ask them if they believe you how much you love them." – Harry retorted.

"Well, Harry, you are such an easy target." – Cassie said diplomatically.

"Well, I'll have you two one of these days." – Harry threatened.

"O, a challenge, Harry – terrifying." – Xsi said pretending to be scared.

"Oh, sod off." – Alamar said. "Or get in trouble."

"Come on, Xsi. Let's go before those two get us in trouble." – Cassie said mockingly.

Cassie and Xsi left leaving the two boys alone.

"One of these days, they'll find their match and then we'll see who is going to laugh last." – Harry said.

"Yes, this day would be very interesting." – Alamar agreed with a thoughtful smile.

"Let's talk about something that's not that depressing." – Harry proposed.

"Ok." – Alamar agreed.

"Are you here alone?"

"No, my mother is here too."

"How long are you going to stay?"

"Few days at least, as mom said." – Alamar replied. "Have to take part of the lousy ceremonies."

"Yeah, you're telling me..." – Harry trailed off. "What shall we do?"

"Skip them but I guess for now we could play. The whether outside is just splendid."

"Alright. Let's go." – Harry said happily.

The evening came quickly. Thant took Harry and Alamar with him to ready them for the ceremony, which was to be at midnight, while Saptienna took the girls. At midnight everyone was ready. They arrived at the northeast tower where the council of the Necromancers was.

Ladies Saptienna and Synca entered first, followed by Cassie, Xsi and Alamar. Harry and Thant entered last. Thant was wearing his battle robe, which was shining like a small sun, as it was made of scales of the long extinct Silver Dragon. Harry walked one step behind him, wearing the traditional family robes – scarlet red with silver stripes.

The room where the ceremony was held had two elevated platforms. On the highest sitting one were seated the Necromancers, and on the other Cassie, Xsi, Synca, Saptienna and Alamar.

The Necromancer's head of the council stood up. He came in the middle of the room holding a staff of bones with a glimmering crystal on the top.

"VEIL MORTIS."

All repeated after him. "VEIL MORTIS," then the Necromancer conjured a shelf with pots positioned in the four cardinal points. He waved at Thant who advanced and placed one forget-me-not-now northwards.

"On the day of the second moon, Mortis came forth."

Thant gestured Harry who advanced to the middle of the room.

"...and reached for four stars in the ocean of night."

Harry knelt. The Necromancer then placed four candles around him each on the cardinal points. Then he drew the sign of infinity between the points.

"I place the stars to bring balance on the Earth. I place infinity between them for creation and destruction."

The Necromancers then shouted in one voice: "For death and life, Mortis Veil."

"In infinity, the darkness is light. Outside it, the light is darkness."

The Necromancer with his staff depicted a scarlet red circle above Harry's head. Thant took out another flower and placed it westwards on the shelf of pots.

"Then came – Sandrile, the seer. He placed the circle of Mortis at the hills of Blackshire and said, "At the dying of the seventh month, shall be born the one that will unite all of the Necromancers under the banner of Mortis and Gallean."

Thant placed another flower this time southwards. The Necromancer depicted a golden circle and continued.

"The one shall not be of Necromancer's descent he will be of the living."

Thant gave the last flower to Harry who placed it eastwards.

"You will know him by the lightening scar on his forehead left by the breath of Death. "

Another scarlet circle appeared above Harry's head. Harry then stood up.

"He shall be friend of the creatures of the world ancient. And Mortis and Gallean shall bestow their power upon him. He shall be known to the Elder Snakes and Dragons as Dracon and to all Necromancers as Nimbus – Prince of the Undead."

The circles above Harry interlinked thus forming red golden ribbon of light. The ribbon took the form of a tiara that settled on Harry's head. All the Necromancers bowed to the ground saluting their prince, their master.

Harry looked a bit uncomfortable with all these people bowing to him but continued and without knowing said the right words.

"TREA AN VISTA NAVADIA AD NECROMENA!" – Harry said. "AD CELESTUS ET STELLIA!"

All Necromancers looked up surprised. Their Prince had spoken the words long forgotten, words he had never heard, yet he knew them. Thant looked at the ceremony Necromancer bewildered. He also did. It was also said by Sandrile (who had also given many clues as to who the one will be and how to recognize him), a year after the prophecy was made, that the one shall know the Ancient Words spoken between Gallean and Mortis in the elder days.

But Harry had not finished yet. "ANT'URIA NECROMENA, AT DOMINA NAT GEIA ET STELLIA – FEDU ELASTU'BE!"

"How is this possible?" – The Necromancer whispered.

"VEIL MORTIS AD VESTA GALLEAN!" – Harry shouted then added looking down at all Necromancers gathered. "RISE!"

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 4

### The wand

Chilly cold laughter echoed, followed by intense green light, and then all went dark with the feeling of pain and terror. Harry woke up suddenly in his bed. His scar was prickling. He was still sweating from the terrible dream. He stood up, went to the bathroom, and stood before the mirror. But there was nothing than his reflection. He instinctively touched his scar but it was still the same. Harry sighed with relief.

On the way back to his bed he noticed the clock on the wall. It was now one minute past twelve. He stopped as he had just realized that he was now eleven – how time flies. With a smile, Harry climbed back in his bed and quickly fell asleep.

He woke up in the morning. The sun was shining brightly. He stood up and headed for the bathroom. He rinsed his face with the fresh cold water and brushed his teeth. Then while dressing up, he realized the first strange event. It was already eleven o'clock and Saptienna has not come to wake him. This was unusual, very unusual. Harry frowned. 'Hmm,' he thought, 'very strange.'

Harry exited his room. The corridor, which was usually dimly lit, was now completely dark. This was also unusual. Harry looked in both directions – there was no sound. Harry pondered on the possibilities of why this was but then shrugging, he headed to the kitchen, which was closer to his room. There was no reason to panic or make any kind of assumptions. Probably, there was a problem with the lighting. It was not the first time it had happened though once he had tried to lit it up using magic and the result was complete disaster as he had made a rather big hole in the wall, which Moandor spent fixing the whole day. Neither Moandor nor Thant had any idea what spell had Harry used to cause this.

Harry reached the kitchen, which was also dark. Harry could not feel any presence but this did not dampen his spirit. He reached for the refrigerator, took out some cereals and milk then reached for a bowl. He poured the milk into the bowl, put the cereals, grabbed a spoon, and headed to the terrace where it was much brighter.

But the absence of people was so noticeable. It made him frown and ask the same question all over again – where is everybody. Truth to be said, it smelled of the jokes of his sisters. His sisters – the inauguration ceremony but then he remembered that it was yesterday. Well, he did not participate in it nor did Alamar or Thant. It was an all girl/women ceremony no boys were allowed.

But he was grateful he had not to participate, because his ceremony was disturbing enough. Now that he had come to think of his, it was very odd – he, an eleven years old boy, had to unite all Necromancers and subsequently perhaps to rule them or whatever not to mention the other prophecy that required him to kill the dark lord. It was also a scary thought.

Harry looked around – nothing was moving like everything had come to a halt even time. He reached for the door of the terrace but it did not move. Harry frowned as he was trying to open it using the opening charm (the charm that required no wand to perform) but it did not work. It was becoming irritating. Fortunately he knew the alternative way of reaching his destination. There was a staircase outside so he had to pass by one of the secret routes that Moandor had shown him last year. He had to reach the living room and press the chandelier near the fireplace then a secret passage would reveal and lead him outside, near the staircase.

The way to the living room was also dark. He just reached the living room when there was a blinding light or maybe not so blinding as he had walked for twenty minutes in the dark so any light could seem blinding at first. As he came in there was a deafening sound and all lights went up.

"SURPRISE!"

Harry looked for the source of the deafening sound and saw his sisters, Alamar, Thant, Moandor, Saptienna and Synca, all gathered together and who were singing now "Happy Birthday to you..."

Harry had frozen in his steps overwhelmed. Just now he understood why everything was so quiet and why he was forced to come this way. They knew he would want to reach the terrace but as this way was blocked he had but one choice to pass by the living room. But Harry was not disappointed, actually he was pleasantly surprised.

Each year, his parents found different ways to surprise him but with the time he had come to anticipate their surprises. But today they managed to surprise him perhaps because they took a note from Xsi and Cassie's book.

They were all standing together with smiles on their faces. Harry now noticed that they were standing around something. Harry made a step towards them. Saptienna came first and hugged him.

"Happy birthday, Harry."

"Thanks." – Harry mumbled.

Thant came also and hugged him too, "Happy birthday, son." Then the rest moved out and Harry saw a big birthday, chocolate and ice-creamed, cake with eleven golden like candles.

"Come." – Saptienna said softly, leading him to the cake. "Make a wish, Harry," – she added.

Harry closed his eyes, made a wish and blew the candles. There was a round of applause. Thant then seated Harry on the table arranged with silver plates, candles and delicacies every boy could dream of.

Xsi came to him, hugged him, "Happy birthday, Harry," she said and gave him a small wrapped package. Harry thanked his sister and opened it. He gaped in surprise of her present – a book – the Old Castles of Britain. Harry was touched. Xsi knew that this would make him happy. He loved everything about old castles, as he had spent time in Synca's citadel and had developed an interest.

Then came Cassie, hugged him, wished him happy birthday and gave her present. Harry opened it. It was an instruction manual as how to make a real wraith chase someone, which made him smile then Lady Synca came. Her gift was also a book though the strangest book he had ever seen. It was old but well preserved. It had a lock on it where it read – Ancient Houses. Harry thanked her but asked. "How do you open it?"

"You have to say the password." – Synca replied.

"Which is?"



"Ethereal."

"Cool, thank you, lady Synca."

"You're welcome, Harry."

Alamar then came. His present was not a book but a watch. But it was not the usual watch. It was an odd one. It had twelve hands but no numbers; instead, little planets moving around the edge.

"You'll need it," – Alamar said.

"Thanks, Alamar." – Harry said looking bemused at the watch. "But what does it show? How does it work?"

"I'll show you later." – Alamar smiled.

Moandor now approached Harry. "Happy birthday, Nimbus," – he croaked and handed him something that looked like a golden antenna. Harry took it in his hands and examined it with curiosity.

"Thank you, Moandor, but what is it?"

"Ah..." – Moandor smiled with delight. "When it starts to vibrate then someone around you is not telling the truth. But of course, in a place, with lots of little ones, could be a little, not so useful."

"Ah, you lost me." – Harry said confused.

"I mean it detects lies but let's say in a place like school, let's say it would be difficult, because children often lie about everything nevertheless it is useful."

"Ah, I get it."- Harry smiled. "Thank you!"

Harry eyed Moandor with curiosity. It was so unlike him. A lie detector, it was unusual but it was a present given with feeling, and Harry appreciated it.

Thant looked at Saptienna who nodded. It was time for their presents. Saptienna moved to Harry and gave him another book – a cooking book, and a green knitted sweater. Thant's present was the

most stunning one so far. It was a ring, a silver ring. On the sides, it was with encrusted roses, holding a black stone. Harry looked at the stone and he could swear he had seen a rose inside it while the others could not.

"Put it on."- Thant said.

Harry put the ring. It was then when he had an odd sensation. The ring was cool but in the same instance warm. For a moment, he had sensed warmth like no other. He could not explain it although somehow he had the feeling he had felt this way before but it seemed like it was ages ago. A tear appeared in his eye.

Thant watched Harry intently. He clearly saw the tear in his eye that vanished shortly after it appeared and smiled with satisfaction. The gift was well placed.

"Now, comes the cutting of the cake." – Saptienna announced. Everyone cheered.

Just as Saptienna was cutting the cake, a gentle knock was heard on the window. Everyone turned around and saw three owls carrying letters. Moandor swiftly opened the window, letting the owls that deposited the letters and flew back through the opened window.

Thant took the letters and distributed them. There was one for Xsi, Cassie, Harry and Alamar. Harry was surprised – who would write him a letter. He had no relatives outside Blackshire or the castle that would write him. Yet there it was a letter, addressed so plainly that there could be no mistake:

Mr. H. Potter

Living room

Solmyr Castle

Blackshire

The envelope was thick and heavy, made of yellowish parchment, and the address was written in emerald-green ink. There was no stamp. Turning over the letter, Harry saw a purple wax seal bearing

a coat of arms: a lion, an eagle, a badger, and a snake surrounding a large letter H.

Harry broke the envelope open and read:

HOGWARTS SCHOOL of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY

Headmaster: ALBUS DUMBLEDORE

(Order of Merlin, First class, Grand Sorc., Chf. Warlock, Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of Wizards).

Dear Mr. Potter,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of the necessary equipment and books.

Term begins on September 1. We await your owl by no later than July 31.

Yours sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall,

Deputy Headmistress

Thant slapped himself mentally, "Of course, Saptienna, we need to reply at once." Saptienna nodded in agreement, "I'll go to fetch Hiemis. You write down the answer for all of them," she said and left the room, the cutting knife still in her hand.

Saptienna returned with an old grey owl with cold blue eyes. Thant came back with four parchments, attached them on the leg of the owl and said, "Hogwarts, Deputy Headmistress, McGonagall," the owl left a little shriek and flew away.

"Harry." – Thant called.

Harry turned to him. Thant gestured him and his sisters to follow. They came into Thant's working office. It was an almost perfect rectangular room with dusty shelves, full of old books, rust shields on the wall above Thant's desk, a few portraits with dark wooden

frames, and a few chairs whose color was difficult to determine, maybe once they were silver. Yellowish parchments, quills and ink bottles stood scattered on Thant's desk in such chaotic order that only Thant knew his way through.

Thant sat behind his desk while Harry, Cassie and Xsi sat on the chairs front of it. Thant looked Harry straight in the eyes and spoke.

"Harry as I have told you, your real parents were wizards. And every wizard's child attends Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." – Thant looked at his daughters and continued. "The school was founded a thousand years ago by the four, most powerful wizards and witches of the time – Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw and Salazar Slytherin. They instituted four houses in their names. Each house has its own values. The Gryffindors are courageous and brave. The Slytherins are devious and cunning. The Hufflepuffs are truthful and diligent. And the Ravenclaws, well, they are the smart ones."

"In which one was you?" – Harry asked intrigued.

"I was in Slytherin."

"Aha, the devious one." – Harry chuckled. There was no surprise there.

"And Mom?" – Xsi asked.

"Saptienna, well, she was a Gryffindor."

That fact was an odd one for Harry and for his sisters.

"And Moandor?" – Cassie asked.

"Ah, well, he was in Hufflepuff." – Thant replied.

"And the Dark Lord?" – Harry couldn't resist asking.

"Well, as Professor Dumbledore told me..."

"The Headmaster?" – Xsi inquired.

"Yes, the headmaster." – Thant nodded. "So as he told me, the Dark Lord was in Slytherin."

"Well, that's one house I do not wish to be in." – Harry said firmly.

"Why not?" – Cassie inquired.

"Well, sis, it's perfectly understandable why." – Xsi answered instead.

"Well, yeah, it is but still." – Cassie agreed. "But it must be interesting."

"Yeah, it falls into your category." – Harry observed sarcastically. "Devious!"

"And his parents?" – Xsi turned to Thant. Harry looked also at Thant. He was indeed curious to know.

"They were in Gryffindor."

"Both?"

"Yes."

"How do you know that?" – Harry asked.

"Well, I had a little chat with Professor Dumbledore." – Thant answered. "Apparently, after their death, he wanted to place you with the only living relatives to your parents."

"You never mentioned this!" – Harry reproached him.

"No, I didn't for a good reason. They are Muggles. Your mother had a sister – a muggle that as I learnt subsequently hates everything related to magic and wizards." – Thant explained.

"Oh, well, good riddance." – Harry concluded though he would have liked to know them.

Thant was sure Harry did not mean it the way it sounded. He was sure that Harry would give anything to be able to speak to someone that knew his parents.

"Harry, Professor Dumbledore knew your parents well so he's the one you can ask about them."

"I will." – Harry said. Cassie and Xsi exchanged looks and hugged their brother.

"Oh, Harry."

"But I won't be in Slytherin." – Harry said. Everyone laughed.

"Of course, not." – Cassie said. "But I will."

"No surprise there." – Xsi observed.

"And you?" – Harry turned to Xsi.

"I don't know." – Xsi shrugged. "I guess I'm the smart one so..."

"You?" – Cassie exclaimed.

"Well, I am." – Xsi pretended to be offended.

"You all are." – Thant concluded the banter.

"And Alamar would be in the losers track – Hufflepuff." – Cassie said.

"I heard that." – Alamar said while entering into Thant's office.

"I know. I was joking." – Cassie grinned.

"Alright, boys and girls, find yourselves an occupation." – Thant said.  
"Tomorrow, we go shopping."

"Shopping?"

"Yes, shopping." – Thant nodded. "We have a lot of things to buy. You're going to school after all. And you'll see your vaults at Gringotts."

"But Mom said we'll see them next year." – Cassie said.

"She did? Really?" – Thant exclaimed. "No, you're going to see them tomorrow."

"Cool!" – Xsi exclaimed.

"Now, you're free to go." – Thant said.

The four left, heading outside to play while Thant returned to the living room where Saptienna and Synca were already discussing the shopping tomorrow – women, Thant thought happily.

The next morning, all prepared for the trip to Diagon Alley. Thant took the pot with the Floo powder. Lady Synca, Saptienna and the girls went first, then Harry, Alamar and Thant. They arrived at the Leaky Cauldron. Inside was as usual dark and shabby. An old woman was in the corner drinking from a tiny glass of sherry. On the opposite corner, a man was smoking a long pipe; a little man in a top hat was talking to the bartender, who was quite bald and looked like a toothless walnut. A pale young man with a turban on his head, his eyes twitching was sitting also in one of the corners drinking something probably very hot, given the vapors coming from the glass.

Thant was about to lead his family out the room when he stopped rooted on the spot. His eyes narrowed and red flames appeared in them.

"Dear, what is it?" – Saptienna was asking but she soon took his posture.

"What's going on?" – Cassie asked.

Lady Synca had joined her parents in the apprehensive stand. Thant looked inauspiciously around. His eyes fell on the young wizard with the turban on his head. Thant did not hold his gaze long on him but it was clear that Thant didn't like the wizard.

"Let's move." – He said hastily.

They walked into a small, walled courtyard, where there was nothing but trash. He tapped the wall three times with his wand. The brick he touched quivered and wriggled. In the middle of the wall a small hole appeared which grew wilder and wilder till a second later they were all facing a large archway, which led onto a cobbled street that twisted and turned out of sight.

"Welcome all," – Thant said, "to Diagon Alley."

The adults grinned at their children's amusement. They stepped through the archway. Harry heard something and turned over his shoulder only to see the archway shrink instantly back into solid wall.

Thant quickly took them by the hand, heading for the ice-cream shop, which was the closest while his children admired the wonders of Diagon Alley.

Alamar, Harry, Xsi and Cassie wished that they had at least ten more eyes. Harry was turning his head in every direction trying to look at everything at once: the shops, the things outside them, the people.

"Harry, look!" – Alamar exclaimed suddenly showing him a sign saying Eyelops Owl

Emporium - Tawny, Screech, Barn, Brown, and Snowy. Then there were several boys about their age, their noses pressed against a window with broomsticks in it.

"Look," – They heard one of them say, "the new Nimbus 2000, the fastest ever. "

There were shops selling everything – robes, telescopes, silver instruments, barrels stuck with bat spleens, eel's eyes, tottering piles of spell books, quills, rolls of parchment, potion bottles, globes of moons and stars...

They arrived at the ice-cream shop. Thant sat the children on the tables outside while he went to buy them ice-creams. He then returned and sat down after distributing the creams.

"Dad, what happened in there?" – Xsi asked.

"There was a dark wizard in there." – Thant whispered.

Everyone looked up intrigued but also concerned.

"We're can't be sure, dear." – Saptienna interjected.



"Why?" – Cassie asked.

"We, Necromancers, are sensitive towards force threads of dark and light." – Synca explained, whispering. "We can sense exceptionally gifted wizards."

"And we can also sense those that are dark or light wizards." – Saptienna added. "So if there is a dark wizard around us, we will know."

"Yes, and Thant believes that there was a dark wizard in the pub." – Synca said.

"It's not a matter of belief – it is a fact." – Thant said firmly. "Though I think he works for one."

"You sure, dear?"

"Well, you can never be sure but I clearly sensed him." – Thant said then nodded more to himself than to the others. "He's definitely working for one and that one is strong. He has left a lasting imprint in the young one."

"You mean to say that he was possessed?" – Synca asked bewildered.

"Possibly but we can't be sure." – Thant nodded again. "And I'm not going approach someone just based on this undefined feeling. We'll talk about this no more. We have something else to do here."

"Then by all means, let's move to the bank." – Synca said.

They ate their ice-creams and headed to Gringotts. As they arrived in front of snowy white building that towered above the rest of the shop buildings they noticed standing beside its burnished bronze door, wearing uniforms of scarlet and gold...

"Yes, those are called Goblins." – Lady Synca said seeing their expressions, walking up the white steps. The goblin was about a head shorter than Harry, with a swarthy clever face, a pointed beard, and as the boys noticed, very long fingers and feet. Now they faced a second door, silver this time, with words engraved upon it:

Enter, stranger, but take heed of what awaits the sin of greed, for those who take, but do not, earn, must pay most dearly in their turn. So if you seek beneath our floors, a treasure that was never yours, thief, you have been warned, beware, of finding more than treasure there.

A pair of goblins bowed them through the silver door and they were in a vast marble hall. About a hundred more goblins were sitting on high stools behind long counters, scribbling in large ledgers, weighing coins in brass scales, examining precious stones through eyeglasses. There were too many doors to count leading off the hall, and yet more goblins were showing people in and out of these. Thant took Harry and his sisters to a counter.

"Good morning," – Thant said to a free goblin. "We are here to make a withdrawal from Mr. Harry Potter's vault, as well as from Xsi and Cassie Solmyr's."

"You have the keys, sir?" – The goblin asked without looking.

"Yes, they are all here." – Thant replied, holding up three tiny golden keys.

The goblin examined the keys very closely then gazed a long time at Xsi, then at Cassie and lastly at Harry.

"They seem to be in order." – The goblin announced. "I will have someone to lead you to your vaults. Griphook!"

Griphook was yet another goblin. They followed him toward one of the doors leading off the hall. Griphook held the door for them. Harry, who expected to see more doors, was due for a surprise. They were in a narrow stone passageway with lit torches. It sloped steeply downward and there were little railway tracks on the floor. Griphook whistled and a small cart came toward them. They climbed in and Cassie sat in Thant's lap to fit in. Thant had no desire to make two trips so they had to fit in.

At first they hurtled through a maze of twisting passages and Harry tried to remember the direction – left, right, right, left, left, left, middle fork, right, but it was impossible. The cart seemed to know where it was going, because Griphook was not steering.

Their eyes stung as the cold air rushed past them, but kept them wide open nevertheless. The cart plunged even deeper, passing an underground lake where huge stalactites and stalagmites that grew from the floor to the ceiling.

The cart suddenly stopped beside a small door in the passage hall, and they all stood up leaning beside the wall. Griphook stood before them.

"Vault 673." – Griphook announced and added. "Key, please."

Thant handed him over the key. Griphook unlocked the door. A lot of green smoke came billowing out, and as it cleared, Harry gasped. Inside were mounds of gold coins, columns of silver, heaps of little bronze coins.

"All yours!" – Thant smiled.

Harry's heart leapt. It was incredible. He had a small fortune buried deep under London.

"The gold ones are called Galleons." – Thant said. "Seventeen silver sickles to a Galleon and twenty-nine bronze Knuts to a Sickle..."

"Dad, we know." – Cassie interrupted.

"Right." – Thant plunged into the vault and grabbed a decent amount of Galleons, Sickles and Knuts. Thant then turned to Griphook, "Vaults Seven hundred fourteen and sixteen, please."

They were going even deeper now and gathering speed. The air become colder and colder as they hurtled round tight corners. Soon they arrived.

"Vault 714." – Griphook announced, took the key Thant handed him and opened the vault. Xsi was sure to faint. The vault was full from the ceiling to the ground with gold, and here and there were mountains of silver and bronze. While Thant was taking the amount needed from the vault, Harry looked at the vault beside Xsi's. That vault, 713, had no lock, which looked strange. Harry turned to Griphook.

"Ar...excuse me."

"Yes," – Griphook said.

"This vault is different, it has no key. How do you open it? I mean if it has no key is it easy to open?" – Harry asked curiously.

Griphook eyed Harry then smiled. "This one is top security vault. If anyone but a Gringotts goblin tries to open it, they would be sucked through the door and trapped inside."

"How often do you check if someone's inside?"

"About once every ten years," – Griphook said with a rather nasty grin.

"I'm done." – Thant said.

Then they walked by the narrow passage till they reached vault 716 – Cassie's vault. The content in there was the same as in Xsi's. Thant quickly took another bag and filled it in then turned to Harry.

"Harry, come this way. Girls, stay here."

Harry followed Thant. They reached vault 720. Thant gave Griphook a silver key. Griphook inserted the key and turned it. Then Thant approached the vault and whispered something. The vault door opened with a cracking sound. Thant gestured Harry to come and peek. Harry looked and his jaw fell. The vault was full entirely of columns of Galleons.

"This is your vault, Harry, and when you become seventeen, it will be all yours. Until then, I'm its keeper. This also means that only I can open this vault."

"What?" – Harry gaped. "Could the goblins open it?"

"No, only I can. Right?" – Thant said turning to Griphook who nodded.

"What would happen if someone else tries to open it?" – Harry asked curious.

"You don't want to know." – Thant replied mysteriously. Griphook also agreed and his grin grew even nastier.

One wild cart ride later they stood blinking in the sunlight outside Gringotts.

"We'll go first to get your uniforms." – Thant said.

"Our what?" – Harry asked.

"Look at your lists." – Thant said.

They took out their letters and unfolded a second piece of paper they haven't noticed before, and read:

HOGWARTS SCHOOL of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY

UNIFORM

First year students will require:

1. Three sets of plain work robes (black)
2. One plain pointed hat (black) for day wear
3. One pair of protective gloves (dragon hide or similar)
4. One winter cloak (black, silver fastenings)

Please note that all pupils' clothes must carry name tags

COURSE BOOKS

All students should have a copy of each of the following:

The Standard Book of Spells (grade 1) by Miranda Goshawk

A History of Magic by Bathilda Bagshot

Magical Theory by Adalbert Waffling

A Beginners' Guide to Transfiguration by Emetic Switch

One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi by Phyllida Spore

Magical Drafts and Potions by Arsenius Jigger

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them by Newt Scamander

The Dark Forces: A Guide to Self Protection by Quentin Trimble

#### OTHER EQUIPEMENT

Wand

Cauldron (pewter, standard size 2) set

Glass or crystal phials

Telescope set

Brass scales

Students may also bring an owl, OR a cat OR a toad

PARENTS ARE REMINDED THAT FIRST YEAR STUDENTS ARE NOT ALLOWED THEIR OWN BROOMSTICKS

"Wow." – Harry exclaimed after examining his list.

"Tough, ah?" – Thant smiled. "Now, let's go for the uniform at Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions."

They entered the shop. A squat witch smiled at them. She was dressed in mauve.

"Good day, Madam Malkin." – Thant greeted.

"Good day, sir." – Madam Malkin greeted, and then turned to Harry and the girls. "Hogwarts, dears? Got the lot here – another young man being fitted up just now, in fact."

In the back of the shop, a pale boy with pointed face stood on a footstool while a second witch pinned up his long black robes. Madam Malkin placed Harry first on a stool next to the boy while the

girls stood nearby. She then slipped a long black robe over his head, and started to pin it to the right length.

Cassie and Xsi scanned with curiosity the boy who also looked at them. Cassie then winked at him and giggled with her sister. Harry looked at them and scolded. He never could understand girls.

"Hogwarts, too?" – The boy asked.

"Yes." – Harry replied.

"My father's next door buying my books and my mom's up the street looking at wands." – The boy said. He had a bored voice. "Then I'll drag them off to take at the racing brooms. I don't see why the first years can't have ones."

"Couldn't agree more." – Cassie said.

The boy looked at Cassie with interest then turned back to Harry.

"Have you got your own broom?"

"No." – Harry replied.

"Play Quidditch at all?"

"No, but my sisters do." – Harry replied motioning at Cassie and Xsi who only grinned.

"I also do. My father says it's a crime if I'm not picked to play for my house, and I must say I agree." – The boy went on. "Know what house you're going to be in?"

"No." – Harry simply said.

"Well, its true no one really knows till they get there, but I know I'll be in Slytherin. All my family has been though I can't imagine being put in Hufflepuff; I'd leave, wouldn't you?"

Here Harry did not reply but it did not seem that the boy was interested in an answer anyway.

"Where are your parents?" – The boy asked.

"Oh, my parents are outside. Being inside here gives them a headache." – Harry replied.

"Oh, I can understand that." – The boy said. "They are our kind, aren't they?"

"Meaning?" – Cassie shot silently suddenly looking murderously at the boy hopefully he did not hear her.

"They are." – Harry replied with pride in his voice.

"Good." – The boy smirked. "I really don't think they should let the other sort in, do you? Some of them haven't even heard about Hogwarts until they got the letter, imagine. I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families. What's your name anyway?"

Harry had to admit that there was something about this boy that he did not like at all but other than that he looked fine. Fortunately before he could answer the boy, Madam Malkin said, "That's you done, my dear," and Harry not sorry for an excuse to stop talking to the boy stepped down from the stool.

"Well, I'll see you at Hogwarts." – The boy said.

"Sure." – Harry said.

He winked at his sisters, and headed for the exit, however not before he saw the devious smiles on their face. They were up to something he could swear it. Thant was waiting patiently outside. He left Saptienna to wait for the girls and took off with Harry. As they walked, Harry wanted to ask him a question that burned him while they were buying his other equipment but decided on asking later.

"Now, what would you like a toad, a cat or an owl?"- Thant asked.

Harry pondered for a moment as they have stopped in front of the shop. "An owl," Harry replied.

"Very well, I shall take you one." – Thant said. "Stay here."

Thant entered into the shop and soon returned with snowy white owl. She was sleeping with her head under her wings.



"There you go." – Thant said and handed him the cage. "We'll name her later. Now, what's left?"

"A wand." – Harry said.

"A wand, well, Ollivander's – one of the best." – Thant said.

A wand, this was what Harry was looking forward to all day long.

The last shop was narrow and shabby. Peeling gold letters over the door read: Ollivanders, Makers of Fine Wands since 382 B.C. A single wand lay on a faded purple cushion in the dusty window.

A bell rang somewhere in the depths of the shop as they stepped inside. It was a tiny place, empty except for a single chair that Thant sat on to wait. Harry felt strangely as though he had entered a strictly forbidden library. He looked at the thousands of narrow boxes piled neatly right up to the ceiling. For some reason, the back of his neck prickled. The very dust and silence in here seemed to tingle with some secret magic.

"Good afternoon." – A soft voice said. Harry jumped, Thant didn't even move as though he had not heard anything at all.

An old man was standing before them, his wide, pale eyes shining like moons through the gloom of the shop.

"Hello." – Harry said.

"Ah, yes," – The man said, "Yes, yes, I thought I might be seeing you, Mr. Potter." It wasn't a question. "You have your mother's eyes. It seems only yesterday she was in here herself, buying her first wand. Ten and a quarter inches long, swishy made of willow, nice wand for charm work."

Mr. Ollivander moved closer to Harry. Harry wished he could blink. Those silvery eyes were a bit scary.

"Your father, on the other hand, favored a mahogany wand. It was eleven inches, pliable, a little more power and excellent for transfiguration. Well, I say your father favored it but it's really the wand that chooses the wizard, of course."

Mr. Ollivander had come even closer, and he and Harry were almost nose to nose.

"And that's where..."

He touched the lightning scar on Harry's forehead with a long, white finger.

"I'm sorry to say that I sold the wand that did it." – He said almost whispering. "Thirteen-and-a-half inches, yew. Powerful wand, very powerful but in the wrong hands...well if I'd known what that wand was going out into the world to do..."

He shook his head and then to Harry's relief, Ollivander spotted Thant and froze in his place.

"Lord Solmyr," – He said with reverence in his voice. "Fourteen inches, elder with the most unusual core, horn string of the long extinct silver dragon, if I'm not mistaken?"

"No, you're not." – Thant smiled.

"Yes, yes, also very powerful but well..." – Mr. Ollivander said then turned back to Harry. "Which is your wand hand?"

"I'm right handed." – Harry replied.

"Right, hold out your arm. That's it." – He measured Harry from shoulder to finger, then wrist to elbow, shoulder to floor, knee to armpit and round his head. "Every Ollivander wand has a core of powerful magical substance, Mr. Potter. We use unicorn hairs, phoenix tail feathers, and the heartstrings of a dragon. No two Ollivander wands are the same, just as no two unicorns, dragons or phoenixes are quite the same. And of course, you will never get such good results with another wizard's wand."

Harry suddenly realized that the tape measure was measuring on its own. Mr. Ollivander was flitting around the shelves, taking down boxes.

"This will do." – He said and tape measure crumbled into a heap on the floor. "Right then Mr. Potter, try this one. Beachwood and dragon

heartstring. Nine inches. Nice and flexible, just take it and give it a wave."

Harry took the wand and waved it but Mr. Ollivander snatched it immediately out of his hand and handed him another.

"Maple and phoenix feather. Seven inches. Try it..."

Harry tried but Ollivander snatched that one too and gave him another.

"Ash and unicorn hair. Ten inches. Try it..."

Harry tried and tried but the pile of wands was mounting higher and higher although Harry had no idea what Ollivander was expecting and looked at Thant but he remained silent. But the more wands Mr. Ollivander pulled from the shelves, the happier he seemed to become.

"Tricky customer, eh? Not to worry, we'll find the perfect match here somewhere – I wonder, now – yes, why not – unusual combination – holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple."

Harry took the wand. He felt sudden warmth in his fingers. He raised the wand above his head, and waved it. Usually, a wand would produce a stream of sparkles but once Harry touched the wand something totally unexpected happened. A golden fiery oriole appeared high above Harry's head. As it grew, the oriole turned into a wide circle like a portal and from it with a song, a song that fills with joy, appeared a fiery bird all in flames.

Ollivander and Thant gaped. It was hard to believe.

"The Sacred Phoenix!" – Thant exclaimed finally, stunned.

The flaming bird made a few circles then landed before Harry. The phoenix was as tall as Harry. It looked him straight into the eyes. It was very strange. Harry felt warmth like no other and in the same moment joy, happiness and strength. The Phoenix then reached Harry's shoulder and pinched him gently. Harry sensed a surge going straight down to his wand, which burst into flames. Harry's instinct was saying to let go of the wand but something deep in him told him to keep it firmly. A feather came out of the wand – a

phoenix feather, which soon integrated itself into the phoenix while another flaming one took its place. The phoenix then took off with a single blow of its wings, and without any warning in a burst of flames vanished.

Thant and Ollivander were standing still rooted on the spot blinking in total bemusement. The appearance of the sacred phoenix was something extremely unusual and just as well improbably rare.

Ollivander cried, "This is indeed very curious and how curious...very curious...very..."

"Excuse me but what is curious?" – Harry asked bemused.

"I remember every wand I've ever sold, Mr. Potter. It so happens that the phoenix whose tail resided in your wand gave another feather, just one other. It was curious that you were to be destined for that wand as its brother had given you that scar. "

Harry swallowed bitterly.

"Yes, thirteen-and-a-half inches. Yew. Curious how these things work. The wand chooses the wizard; remember...I think we must expect great things from you Mr. Potter... After all, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things...terrible, yes, but great."

Harry shivered. However, after this statement, for the first time in his life, Harry remembered something more the dreams he had. He clearly saw the wand that killed his parents but now he saw something else – the hand that was holding it, then the whole figure – hooded.

"But then..." – Ollivander did not finish his sentence.

"I don't understand."

"Harry, the appearance of the Sacred Phoenix is extremely rare." – Thant informed.

"And it has not happened for nearly six centuries." – Ollivander added then continued. "No wand since that time has ever carried a feather of the Sacred One as power core. They are considered to give the wand a great power even greater than the one of the Silver

Dragon. I think we can surely expect great things from you, Mr. Potter, very great and exceptional since you have the blessing of the Sacred Phoenix. This is very unusual."

Harry wasn't sure he liked Mr. Ollivander too much but paid the seven golden Galleons for his wand, and Ollivander bowed them from his shop.

Thant then took Harry back to the ice-scream café, and there they waited for Saptienna and the girls. They appeared after an hour. Stunningly, Cassie and Xsi had almost the same type of wands as Harry. Saptienna told Thant of their wand acquirement. It was not as stunning as Harry's but still impressive.

Cassie had holly and dragon heartstrings, ten inches, flexible, and Xsi had willow and thunderbird feather, twelve inches, supple. Then Alamar and his mother came. Alamar had birch and strings of unicorn horn, nine-and-a-half inches, swishy. They all passed their wands looking at them.

"Time to go." – Saptienna announced.

"Oh!" – Cassie groaned.

"Now!" – Saptienna said. "Synca, Alamar, we'll see you on next weekend or...?"

"On September first, I'm afraid." – Synca replied. "We have to visit Alamar's grandfather Bish in Cornwall."

"Oh, alright then." – Saptienna said, hugged Lady Synca, and wished her good bye.

Thant did the same and then they headed back to the castle. Once they arrived, Thant made a hand signal to Saptienna. She understood and nodded. After leaving the girls and Harry, she headed for Thant's working office.

"Dear," – She said.

"Ah, my darling."

"What is it, dear?"

"Well nothing really."

"Come on." – Saptienna insisted.

"Well, it is our children and Harry." – Thant said but seeing Saptienna's expression elaborated. "Well, mostly Harry. He got a feather of the Sacred Phoenix who came in personally to grant him it and then Cassie and Xsi. Cassie with holly and dragon heartstrings, but not just any dragon – the golden dragon, there is only one to my knowledge left. I don't think that Ollivander even knows that part. And Xsi got willow and thunderbird feather. It is an unusual combination. It might seem like coincidence but I have the feeling it isn't. Also that young man who is serving the dark lord."

"We don't know whether he is serving a dark lord or not." – Saptienna objected.

"No, we don't but I'm rarely wrong." – Thant said sighing deeply.

"I know, dear. But maybe they are all destined for something great. And if you do feel uncomfortable, you could always speak to your brother – Lord Gelu." – Saptienna added softly.

"You're right I do feel uneasy with it. I'll call him tomorrow."

"Now, get some rest, dear. It was a long day."

"I will, dear. Thank you!"

"Always." – Saptienna said with love, kissed her husband and exited, leaving Thant along with his disturbed thoughts.

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 5

### Hogwarts Express

August was a month that was nice and warm but mostly uneventful. Harry spent most of his time in the grounds of the castle playing with his sisters or with Thant practicing incantations, spells and charms. He also spent time in his bedroom reading the new books for his first year at Hogwarts. He had a particular interest in charms, potions and history. The other subjects also were interesting but not as much, at least not for him, while Xsi found transfiguration to be fascinating – the mere idea of being able to transfigure oneself into an animal or an object into something else was extraordinarily cool. Cassie, on the other hand, had more interest in Defense against the Dark Arts (or merely the Dark Arts) and Fantastic Beasts.

During this month there was one more revelation that Thant made to Harry and the girls. It seemed that Moandor was not the only servant in the castle though Thant preferred not to say servant but merely employee. There were house elves working in the castle. Harry wanted to know who so Thant summoned the one that has taken care all the time of Harry's room.

"Princess." – Thant called.

With a loud crack, a tiny figure appeared. It had large bat-like ears and blue eyes shining like distant stars in the night sky. The little creature bowed so low that its nose touched the carpet.

Harry looked at her with curiosity. She was wearing a nice and clean silk dress – like a real princess. It was hard to believe that he has never seen her.

"Lord Nimbus." – Princess said in a high-pitched voice.

"Hi and call me Harry." – Harry said. He had not come to terms of being called a lord yet and truthfully he did not want to.

"Yes, Lord Harry." – The house-elf said.

"Just Harry." – Harry insisted.

"Yes, Harry." – Princess said it correctly this time.

"Now, Harry." – Thant said. "House elves as you know have a magic of their own. She can come to you no matter where you are. The actual defenses around magic places usually can't stop them as they are made against wizards only."

"Cool." – Harry exclaimed.

"And Necromancers too." – Saptienna added.

"Dad, er, are they paid?" – Cassie asked eyeing Thant.

"Usually, house elves are not paid. They've been enslaved for a long time by the wizards and with time they have come to terms that a house elf should not be paid for his services. A house elf serves one family for eternity unless it has been released."

"How?" – Xsi asked with growing disgust.

"Well, if you give an elf a cloth." – Thant replied.

"So is Princess being paid?" – Harry repeated Cassie's question.

"Yes, she is and all her brothers and sisters that are working for me and the rest of the Necromancers. We have a different view about these things." – Thant said.

"So who has taken care of us?" – Xsi asked with curiosity.

"You two need not someone to take care of you." – Saptienna replied instead. "You were always very independent."

"But two of the elves volunteered." – Thant inserted.

"And it came to be a disaster." – Princess added with a grin.

"How so?" – Harry asked curious.

"Well, the two are very, how to say, crazy even for house elves. They like to cause trouble so they have helped Ladies Cassie and Xsi in their mischievous adventures." – Princess replied.



"That's not true. We came up with all ideas on our own." – Cassie objected.

"Well, not entirely." – Xsi reminded.

"Well, yes, but mostly..."

"Well, you see Harry." – Princess said seeing Harry's confusion. "They left some manuals, let's call them, near the ladies so it was logical that at some point they'd become interested."

"And as I was the most likable and vulnerable target..." – Harry reasoned and everybody laughed.

"Well, sorry, Harry, little brother but you are." – Cassie said with an innocent smile on her face.

"So who were those two?" – Harry asked, a whirl of feelings building inside him like a storm.

"Oh, well they are on vacation right now." – Thant said quickly seeing Harry's thoughtful expression.

"But you said that they could be called." – Harry insisted.

"Well, yes they could but..." – Thant said.

"But seeing Master Harry's wishful look of vengeance, it'd be best not to." – Princess finished Thant's sentence.

This time even Harry laughed. He did not want vengeance but he certainly wanted to thank these two for insinuating his sisters into the prankster's business.

"I'll tell you their names later." – Saptienna said to the girls.

"It's not fair." – Harry protested. "They can learn about Princess but I can't about theirs."

"Well, yes, Harry but Princess has not helped your sisters in that way." – Saptienna replied.

"Everybody calm down." – Thant said. "They may have laid the path but the girls have walked through the door alone with no one's help so there is no real point at pointing the finger at the house elves. That's the end of this discussion."

"But..." – Harry protested.

"It's the end." – Thant concluded raising slightly his voice thus Harry gave up.

August passed quickly and the first day of school approached at last. The day before first of September, Thant gathered the children in the main hall. He gave them their tickets for as he called it Hogwarts Express, which leaves London from the strangely numbered platform 93/4 at King's Cross station. Xsi, logically, asked why and Thant gave the stunning answer.

"Tomorrow, you three will go to London alone. You will reach the platform on your own. You always said that you are no longer babies that you're independent – now is the time to prove it."

"But..." – Cassie tried to argue.

"No buts." – Saptienna intervened. "You'll go alone. It's time to grow up like you always professed you already have."

"Why do you have to include me into this?" – Harry asked. "I haven't said anything of the kind."

Thant smiled. "Indeed but not in so many words. Don't you worry! It's a tradition in this family. Saptienna and I have done it, and Alamar will be doing it too so you won't be alone."

Harry sighed in defeat. He saw that Thant was serious but it seemed that his brave sisters were not very happy and it was good to see them beaten for once. Harry thought it should not be that difficult although he had no idea how they would reach the station with this entire luggage.

"Also, I do not want you to use the magic you have learnt here in school." – Thant said.

"Why not?" – Xsi inquired.

"Well, it'd be because some of it would be real Necromancer's magic and we'd like to remain hidden." – Thant replied diplomatically. "All the spells that you have learnt to do without wand would fall into this category. Oh, and Harry, the one you mastered yesterday too."

"Okay." – Harry said. Thant had taught him how to transform his wand into a staff, which was usually very hard to do anyway. But Harry learnt it pretty quickly.

"Now go to bed. Tomorrow, I'll leave you at the Leaky Cauldron from where you'll make your way to the station." – Thant said.

"Come on, girls to bed." – Saptienna stood up gesturing the girls.

The girls followed their mother. Harry wished good night to Thant and headed to his room where he had already packed. He only had to put his owl into its cage.

"Come on Hedwig." – Harry called.

He had called it Hedwig, as he discovered the name inside one of his new books. The owl flew inside not before she pecked him gently on the hand as a sign of affection. Harry gave her a pat on the head and headed to the bathroom. After washing and brushing his teeth, he lay down on his bed, put his glasses away and fell quickly asleep.

It felt like ten minutes of sleep when Thant woke him up. He opened the curtains letting the morning sunrays inside the room.

"Good morning, Nimbus." – Thant greeted.

"Good morning." – Harry yawned. "What time is it?"

"It's eight o'clock."

"Why so early? When is the train leaving?"

"The train's leaving King's Cross at eleven o'clock sharp so you don't to be late."

"Is it that far from the Leaky Cauldron?"

"No but by the time you're ready to leave time could come short and the train waits for no one." – Thant answered. "Now go and get ready. I'll take your trunk to the hall."

Harry got ready then headed to the kitchen where his breakfast was already served. There was no sign of his sisters yet, which was usually unusual, as they always were there before him although he always got up first. He shrugged, ate his breakfast and went to the library where Thant was holding a suiting number of books and maps. He soon found a map of London and located the Leaky Cauldron then he researched how to reach King's Cross. Few minutes later satisfied with the result he went to the living room and patiently waited for everyone else to get finally ready because he was really nervous and couldn't wait to go to Hogwarts.

It was not before half past nine when everyone was finally ready. Thant had sent the trunks already to the Cauldron.

"Well, have a good year children." – Saptienna wished and hugged them one by one.

With the Floo powder they arrived at the Cauldron, which as Harry reminded himself was one of the most unpleasant ways to travel. He took his trunk and waited for Cassie and Xsi who Thant was cleaning up from the dust.

"Good, you are all ready. Have a good term and don't forget to write." – Thant wished.

"Thanks Dad." – Cassie, Xsi and Harry replied.

Harry led the girls out. They reached the underground and took the subway. They arrived at King's Cross at half past ten. Harry found some trolleys where they put their trunks and started looking for platform 93/4. But soon Harry realized that Thant had obviously forgotten to tell them how exactly to reach it as they were standing between platforms 9 and 10. There was no sign of their platform.

"Well, we have a problem." – Cassie remarked.

"Obviously." – Harry agreed.

"So what now?"- Xsi asked.

"Well, we continue to walk until we find someone that does know how." – Cassie said.

"And if we don't?" – Xsi asked skeptically.

"Then we go back home." – Cassie replied.

Just before Harry could say a word, a group of people passed behind them and he distinctly heard.

" – always packed with Muggles, of course – "

Harry and the girls swiftly turned around. They saw a plump woman who was talking to four boys, all with red, flaming hair. Each of them was pushing a trunk like theirs.

"This way." – Harry said following the group till they stopped. Harry, Cassie and Xsi were now all ears for what the group was saying.

"What's the platform's number?" – The plumped woman asked.

"Nine and three quarters." – A small girl, also red-haired, piped, who was holding her hand. "Mom, can't I go too..."

"You're not old enough, Ginny. Now Percy, you go first."

The oldest boy in the group marched towards the barrier between platforms nine and ten. But just as reached it, a large crowd of people came before him and by the time they cleared, the boy had vanished. Harry and the girls looked at each other baffled.

"Fred, you're next." – The plump woman said.

"I'm not Fred, I'm George." – The boy said. "Honestly, woman, you call yourself a mother? Can't you tell I'm George?"

"Sorry, George, dear."

"Only joking, I'm Fred." – The boy said, and he went off. His twin called after him to make haste, and he must have done so, because a second later, he had gone – but how?

Harry moved closer and turned to the plump woman. "Excuse me."

"Hello, dears." – She said. "First time at Hogwarts? Ron's new too."

She pointed at the last and youngest of her sons. He was tall, thin and gangling, with freckles, big hands and feet, and a long nose.

"Yes, the thing is that we don't know how to..."

"How to get onto the platform? – She asked kindly, and Harry nodded. "Not to worry, dears." – She said. "All you have to do to reach is to walk between platforms nine and ten. Don't stop and don't be scared that's very important. Best do it at a bit of a run if you're nervous. Go on, pass before Ron."

"Okay. Cassie, Xsi, come on." – Harry called.

"You first, Nimbus." – Cassie said.

"Alright."

"How gallant is he, isn't he Cassie?" – Xsi said.

"Indeed, very brave." – Cassie confirmed dramatically.

Harry ignored them and started pushing his trolley toward the barrier that looked quite solid. Harry walked more quickly. He had just the idea that he would be smashing right into that barrier and then he'll be the laugh stock of his sisters – leaning forward on his cart, he broke into heavy run – the barrier drew nearer and nearer – he closed his eyes ready for the crash – but he didn't – he kept on running.

As he opened his eyes, he saw he was standing on a platform, packed with people, next to a scarlet red steam engine. A sign overhead said "Hogwarts Express, Eleven O'clock". Harry looked behind him and saw a wrought-iron gateway where the barrier had been, with the words – Platform Nine and Three Quarters on it. And a second later his sisters joined him.

"Cool." – Cassie exclaimed obviously she had enjoyed the running for the crashing part at the barrier.

The first four carriages were full so Harry and the girls pushed their trolleys down the platform looking for empty seats. They passed by a round-faced boy who was just saying, "Gran, I've lost my toad, again."

"Oh, Neville." – They heard the old woman say.

They continued on their way down the platform and found an empty compartment near the end of the train. Harry first took the owls inside and then returned for the trunks.

"You know you could help me with those, I'm not superman." – Harry said turning to the girls.

"Nimbus, you're a boy and we're girls. Those heavy trunks aren't for our delicate hands." – Cassie protested.

Harry snorted and tried to lift first Cassie's trunk up the steps but failed.

"Want a hand with those?" – It was one of the red-haired twins he'd seen passing through the barrier.

"Yes, please." – Harry replied relieved.

"Oy, Fred, c'mere and help!"

With the help of the twins, Harry managed to put the trunks in a corner of the compartment.

"Thanks!" – Cassie said while Harry looked exhausted. He pushed his hair away.

"What's that?" – One of the twins said suddenly when spotted the lightning scar.

"Blimey." – The other twin said. "Are you?"

"He is." – The first twin said. "Aren't you?"

Harry looked bemused for a moment. "Who?"

"Harry Potter." – The twins chorused.

"Oh, him. He is." – Xsi answered instead of Harry.

The two twins gazed at Harry who felt himself turning red. Then a voice came through the window, "Fred? George? Are you there?"

"Coming Mom." – They said then looked at the girls who obviously giggled, took another peek at Harry and hopped off the train.

"What?" – Harry asked bellicosely.

"Nothing, Nimbus." – Cassie replied, trying not to burst into laughter.

Harry sat near to the window where he was half-hidden so he could watch the red-haired family. He just heard the plump woman say.

"Now, Percy, have a good year, dear and don't forget to send me an owl."

She kissed Percy on the cheek who then he left, and then she turned to the twins.

"Now, you two – this year, try to behave. If I get one more owl telling me – you've blown up a toilet or..."

"Blown up a toilet? We've never blown up a toilet." – One of the twins sounded offended.

"Great idea though, thanks, Mom." – The other twin said excited by the idea.

"It's not funny, and look after Ron."

"Don't worry, Mom. Ickles Ronnie is safe with us."

"Shut up." – Ron said though he was almost as twice as tall as the twins.

"Hey. Mom, guess what? Guess who we just met on the train?"

"You remember the black haired boy who was near us in the station? Know who he is?"



"No, who?"

"Harry Potter."

"Oh, Mom, can I go on the train and see him..." – The little girl squealed.

"You've already seen him, Ginny, and the poor boy isn't something you goggle at the zoo. Is he really? Fred, how do you know?"

"Asked him – saw the lightning scar."

"Poor dear – no wonder he was alone, I wondered. He was ever so polite when he asked how to get to the platform."

"Well, he was not alone." – Ginny suddenly remarked. "He was with two girls."

"Probably just as alone as him. Poor children."

At this remark Harry laughed quietly looking at Cassie and Xsi who were silently listening to the conversation outside. They looked back at him with mischief in their eyes.

A whistle sounded and muffled the rest of the conversation.

"Hurry up." – Their mother said. The boys climbed onto the train and bent over the window to receive a kiss by their mother when their younger sister began to cry.

"Don't worry Ginny, we'll send you load of owls."

"We'll send you a Hogwarts toilet seat too."

"George."

"Only joking, Mom."

The train began to move. Harry watched the girl and the mother disappear as the train rounded the corner. Houses flashed past the window.

The door of the compartment opened and the youngest red-haired boy entered.

"Is the seat free?" – The boy asked pointing at the seat opposite Harry's. "Everywhere else is full."

"Please." – Harry said nodding.

The boy sat down, looked at Harry, but quickly looked away as though he had not intended to look. Then his look fell on Cassie and Xsi. It was as though he had just noticed them. He started to turn red. The girls looked at him with curiosity but said nothing.

"Hey, Ron." – The twins were back.

"Listen we're going down the middle of the train. Lee Jordan's got a giant tarantula."

"Right."- Ron mumbled.

"Harry," – The other twin spoke. "Did we introduce ourselves? Fred and George Weasley. And this is our brother Ron."

"And you are?" – George asked turning to the girls.

"This is Cassie and Xsi." – Harry answered instead.

"Friends of yours?" – Fred inquired.

"No, sisters." – Cassie replied giggling already.

"Sisters?" – George repeated baffled.

"Yes, they are." – Harry confirmed slightly amused.

Fred and George looked at each other obviously confused, which of course only increased Cassie's laughter and soon was joined by her sister. Ron also looked strangely at the girls.

"Alright then see you later." – Fred said and exited the compartment with his brother.

"Bye." – Harry, Cassie, Xsi and Ron said.

"Are you really Harry Potter?" – Ron blurted out.

Harry nodded.

"Oh, well, I thought it might be one of their jokes." – Ron said and added pointing at Harry's head. "Do you have the scar?"

Harry pulled back his bangs to show the lightning scar. Ron stared.

"So this is where You-Know-Who..."

"Yes but I don't remember much." – Harry quickly lied for he knew.

"Wow." – Ron said then looked away as though he realized he had done something wrong then turned to Cassie. "Are you really his sisters?"

"Yes." – Cassie replied.

"Actually, foster sisters." – Harry corrected. "Would have been great to grow up with three brothers though..."

"Five." – Ron corrected him too, looking for some reason gloomy. "I'm the sixth of our family going to Hogwarts. I've got to live up to the family name. Charlie was a Quidditch captain and Bill head boy. Now Percy's the prefect. Fred and George, they mess around a lot but do get good marks. So everyone expects me to do as well as and even better than the others but if I do, won't be a big deal, they have done it first. I've got Bill's old robes, Charlie's old wand and Percy's old rat – Scabbers."

Ron reached inside his pocket and pulled out a fat gray rat, which was asleep. In this moment, Cassie looked sternly at the rat. Xsi also acted this way.

"What is it?" – Harry asked suddenly noticing their behavior.

"Nothing." – Cassie replied trying to sound calm but Harry clearly saw she wasn't. She pointed outside and left the compartment.

"Excuse me, Ron." – Harry said and went outside. "What is it?"

"That rat." – Cassie replied.

"You're afraid?" – Harry asked amused.

"No." – Cassie replied bellicosely. "There's something wrong with it."

"What do you mean? It looks perfectly fine besides being asleep."

"No, it's not that." – Cassie replied looking slightly pale, which worried Harry. "I don't know what it is exactly but this rat is giving me the shivers."

Harry looked at Cassie and realized that she's been serious.

"Okay, let's find you another compartment." – Harry said concerned.

"Thank you, Nimbus." – Cassie said with gratitude.

Harry moved across the compartments and returned after a while.

"I found you a place. Come."

"Wait – Xsi too."

"Oh, okay." – Harry peeked inside the compartment and said. "Xsi, come on."

Later Harry returned back to the compartment. Ron looked at him questioningly wondering what he had done wrong.

"It's not you." – Harry calmed him. "They're dead afraid of rats. It's nothing personal."

"Oh, okay, I could have put him back in my pocket. They could have said something."

"Well, they are a little shy and very sensitive." – Harry explained though they were not at all shy but for some reason he did not want to voice the real reason.

"Well, anyway, Scabbers is kind of useless. He sleeps all the time. Percy got an owl for being a prefect, but they couldn't aff... I mean I got Scabbers." – Ron's ears went pink as though he had said too

much but Harry did not think being poor is something bad although his family and Thant's were rich. So Harry told him as much as he deemed necessary like being chased by his sisters, the scary but gentle steward Moandor (omitting only the part of the Sandrile's prophecy), and this seemed to cheer up Ron, after all their lives seemed not so different though Ron did not live in a castle.

"So I still don't know much about my parents or Voldemort and..."

Ron gaped. "You said You-Know-Who's name." – Ron was shocked and impressed.

"Well, Thant says it is ridiculous to call someone like this, I happen to agree with him but not because I'm brave or something. So you see I have lots to learn. I might even be the worse in the class." – Although, Harry did not believe it either but he thought it might cheer Ron further up.

"Oh, don't worry, you won't be. There are a lot of people some even come from muggle families but they learn pretty quickly."

While they were talking the train had past by fields full of cows and sheep. They stayed quiet for a time as the fields and lanes slowly faded in the distance.

Around half past twelve, there was a clattering outside, and a smiling, dimpled woman, slid back their door saying, "Anything off the cart dears?"

Ron, turning red, muttered that he'd brought sandwiches. Harry on the other hand was rather hungry. The woman had Bettie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, Drooble's Best Blowing Gum, Chocolate frogs, Pumpkin Pasties, Cauldron Cakes, Licorice Wands, which represented all his favorite things to eat (not that they had any nutrition value but still).

Ron stared as Harry dropped the lot on the seat while he had taken out the lumpy package containing four sandwiches. "She always forgets that I don't like corned beef."

Harry looked at him for a moment then said. "Come on; swap it for one of these."

"You don't want one of these."

Ron tried to protest but Harry insisted. "Come on."

And Ron took it. Harry, actually, enjoyed sharing. He was never selfish, one of the things that made Saptienna and Thant very proud.

Ron unwrapped a frog. The chocolate frog jumped out of his hands and off the open window. Ron then took out the card that was inside and snorted. "Not Morgana, again," but seeing Harry's expression explained. "You see they contain cards of famous wizards and witches. I've got about a hundred of them. I'm only missing Agrippa and Ptolemy."

Harry took his card and looked at it. It was Dumbledore. He wore half-mooned glasses, had a long crooked nose, and a flowing silver hair, beard and moustache. So this was Dumbledore. Harry looked at the back where he read:

Albus Dumbledore – Currently Headmaster of Hogwarts

Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times, Dumbledore is particularly famous for defeating the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945; for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon blood, and his work in alchemy with his partner Nicholas Flamel.

Harry looked at front part of the card but Dumbledore was gone. He already knew that wizards in photos tend to move or disappear from time to time so he wasn't that surprised to see Dumbledore gone but he soon returned and gave him a little smile. Harry then turned his attention to the beans.

"You want to be careful with those." – Ron warned. "They mean it – every flavor beans – you can get the ordinary – chocolate and strawberry but you could get also spinach, liver and George mentioned once booger one."

"I know!" – Harry said joyfully and took a golden-brown one. "Yaks, ear wax.

The country side now flying past the windows was becoming wilder. The neat fields had gone. Now there were woods, twisting rivers and dark green hills.

There was gentle knock on the door and the round-faced boy Harry had passed on the platform came in. He was all in tears.

"Sorry," – He said. "But have you seen a toad at all? It keeps running away."

"Don't worry, it'll turn up." – Harry reassured.

"Hope so." – The boy said miserably and left.

"Don't know why he's bothered." – Ron said. "If I had a toad I'd lose it the moment I could but given that I have Scabbers I shouldn't be talking."

Ron took the rat again. Harry looked at it closely. It was still asleep but Harry noticed that it was missing a toe.

"I tried once to turn him yellow but it didn't work. I could show you, if you want..."

"Sure."

Ron rummaged through his trunk and found battered-looking wand with the unicorn hair nearly poking out. He was about to perform the spell when the door of the compartment opened again. The round-faced boy was back but he was not alone. He was with a girl already dressed with her new Hogwarts robes.

"Has anyone seen a toad?" – The girl asked her voice was rather bossy kind of voice. She had lots of brown bushy hair and large front teeth. "Neville's lost one."

"No, we haven't." – Harry replied.

"Oh, you're doing magic?" – The girl asked excited seeing Ron's wand. "Let's see."

Ron cleared up his throat – "Sunshine, daisies, butter mellow, turn this stupid fat rat yellow." – He waved his wand but nothing happened.

"Are you sure that's a real spell?" – The girl said. "Well, it's not very good is it? I've tried a few simple spells and they all worked perfectly fine. My parents are all muggles so I got really excited when I received my letter. I mean Hogwarts is a famous school and I've learnt everything about it and all of our books by heart, of course. By the way, I'm Hermione Granger and you are?" – She had said all that very quickly that's why Harry and Ron looked at her a bit bewildered.

"I'm Ron Weasley." – Ron muttered.

"Harry Potter." – Harry said.

"Really? I've read everything about you. You're in Modern Magical History and The rise and fall of the dark arts, and the great wizarding events of the 20th century; I got a few extra books."

"Wow." – Harry exclaimed. It was shocking to know how much everyone knew about him.

"Goodness, you didn't know? I'd have found everything, if it was me." – Hermione said. "Do you know in which house you'd be? I hope I'm in Gryffindor. That's Dumbledore's house but I guess it wouldn't be that bad in Ravenclaw. I've done a bit of research. Well, anyway, we've better look for Neville's toad. You've better change into robes, we'll be arriving soon. See you." – And she left with the toadless boy.

"I hope I'm not in the same house with her. Fred and George gave me this stupid spell to make fun of me, again." – Ron said while throwing his wand back into his trunk.

"Have all your brothers been in the same house?"

"Yeah, Gryffindor. And logically, everyone expects me to be there too. Now that Charlie and Bill's left."

"Where do you go after school?"

"Well, Charlie is in Romania studying dragons and Bill's in Africa doing something for Gringotts." – Ron explained. "Did you hear someone broke into Gringotts trying to rob a high security vault?"



Harry gaped. "Really? What happened?"

"Nothing and that's the big news. They haven't been caught but they haven't taken anything either and that's why it's weird. Dad says that it must be the work of a dark wizard to get round Gringotts. So everyone's scared because it might be You-Know-Who behind it."

Harry got silent for a moment. He remembered vault 713 and Griphook who told him it was top security. He was just to tell Ron about it when the compartment door slid open again but it was not Neville or Hermione Granger.

Three boys entered, and Harry recognized the middle one at once: it was the pale boy from Madam Malkin's robe shop. He was now looking at Harry with a lot more interest he'd shown in the shop.

"So is it true? Everyone's saying this is Harry Potter's compartment. So it is you?"

"Yes, I'm."- Harry replied simply. He looked at the other boys that were thickset and looked extremely mean.

"Oh, those are Crabbe and Goyle." – The pale boy said carelessly. "And I'm Malfoy, Draco Malfoy."

"Nice to meet you." – Harry said. "Again."

Ron on the other hand had let a slight cough, which might have been a way to hide a snigger. Draco looked at him and said sharply.

"You find my name funny but you need not tell me yours. My father told me all Weasleys have red hair, freckles and more children they can afford." – Then turned back to Harry. "You'll soon find out that some wizarding families are better than the others, Potter. You wouldn't want go making friends with the wrong ones. I can help you there."

He held out his hand expecting Harry to shake it but Harry didn't. He did not like the boy's tone this time.

"I think I can tell who the wrong ones are for me, thanks mate."

Only a pale fringe appeared on Draco's cheeks. "I would be careful if I were you, Potter. If you're not a bit politer you might end up the same way your parents did. They also didn't know what's best for them. You hang out around with the likes of Weasleys and it'll rub off on you."

Both Harry and Ron stood up.

"Say that again." – Ron flared up.

"Oh what, you're going to fight us?" – Draco sneered.

"Or you could leave now." – Harry said, eyes sparkling not minding the fact that Crabbe and Goyle were bigger than Ron and him but hopefully the door of the compartment had slid open and Harry's smile grew wide given who had just entered.

"Really?" – Draco repeated mockingly.

"Yes, really." – A deeper voice said behind Draco and his two gorilla friends.

Draco swiftly turned around and faced Alamar, Harry's best friend. Alamar was a bit shorter than Harry but thickset, broad-shouldered and looked twice as mean as Crabbe and Goyle.

"And who are you?" – Draco shot.

"I'm Alamar Darkstone." – Alamar replied. "But you need not tell me who you are. Mom always says that all Malfoys have silver hairs, peacockery in large stocks, and more money than they deserve as well as very small brains."

This time Draco did turn red.

"Oh, and for the record Malfoy, my family is way older than yours therefore I'm more a wizard than you can ever hope to be. Oh and Harry's as well. So if I were you, I'd watch my tongue or you can end up just as your father's master – down the drain. Now get lost or I'll help you." – Alamar said those last words with fiery eyes and adamant tone that accepts no contradiction.

Draco turned tail and got off the compartment as quickly as possible, Crabbe and Goyle ever on his heels.

"Hey Harry." – Alamar said this time more calmly.

"Hey Alamar, I was wondering where you were. Didn't see you on the platform not that I had a lot of time." – Harry admitted.

"When did you get here?"

"Half past ten."

"Oh, that's why. I came about half past nine."

"Oh, Alamar, this is Ron Weasley." – Harry introduced Ron. Alamar turned to Ron and held out his hand.

"Hello, nice to meet you."

"It's nice to meet you too." – Ron took his hand and shook it. He was to say the least impressed with Alamar's performance.

"Oh, Harry, we better get dressed, we're almost there." – Alamar said.

A voice echoed in the train, "We'll be reaching Hogwarts in five minutes. Please leave your luggage on the train; it will be taken separately to the school."

The train slowed down and finally stopped. People pushed their way toward the door and out to a tiny, dark platform. Harry shivered in the cool night. He looked for Cassie and Xsi and soon spotted them, as they were making their way anyway to him. Then a lamp came bobbing over the heads of the students, and Harry heard: "Firs' years! Firs' years over here."

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 6

### The Sorting

"Firs' years! Firs' years over here." - The voice belonged to a giant of a man. His face was almost hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild tangled beard, but you could make his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair. He looked down at Harry. "Are you alright, Harry?"

Harry did not ask how this man knew his name because it seemed that everyone around here does.

"Fine, thank you!"

"C'mon, follow me – any more firs' years? Mind yer step, now! Firs' years follow me!"

Slipping and stumbling, they followed the giant down a steep, narrow path. Nobody spoke much.

"Ye' all get yer firs' sight o' Hogwarts in a sec." – The giant called over his shoulder. "Jus' round this bend here."

The narrow path had suddenly opened onto the edge of a great dark lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the night, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers.

"No more'n four to a boat." – The giant called, pointing at a fleet of little boats sitting in the water by the shore. Harry, Cassie, Xsi and Ron were together. "Everyone in?" shouted the giant. "Right then – FORWARD!"

And the fleet of boats moved off at once, gliding across the lake, which looked as smooth as glass. Everyone was silent, enjoying the view of the castle above them.

"Heads down!" – The giant yelled, as they had reached the cliffs; they bent their heads while passing through a curtain of ivy that hid the opening into the cliff face. They were in a dark tunnel, which seemed to lead underneath the castle till it reached the underground harbor where the boats stopped.

They clambered up a passageway in the rock after the giant's lamp, coming out onto smooth, dark-green grass right in the shadow of the castle.

"Everyone's here? Good!" – The giant said while rising his fist and knocking three times on the castle door.

The door opened at once. A tall witch with emerald-green robes stood there. She was a rather severe-looking woman who was wearing square glasses, her black hair drawn into a tight bun.

"The first years, Professor McGonagall."

"Thank you, Hagrid. I'll take them from here."

She pulled the door wide open. The entrance hall was huge. The stone walls were lit with white torches just like in Solmyr's castle, the ceiling was too high to make out, and a magnificent marble case facing them led to the upper floors.

The students followed Professor McGonagall. Harry could hear the buzz of hundreds of voices coming from a doorway to the right but the Professor showed them into an empty chamber off the hall.

"Welcome to Hogwarts." – Professor McGonagall said. "The start-of-term banquet will start shortly but before you enter to join your classmates in the Great Hall you must be sorted into your houses. The sorting ceremony is very important, because while you'll be here the house is going to be like your family. You will have classes with the rest of your house, sleep in your house dormitory, and spend free time in your house common room."

"Excuse me, Professor McGonagall, madam." - The voice of Cassie interrupted her.

"Yes," – Professor McGonagall said surprised her speech was interrupted.

"Does this mean that we can't go to visit others in their respected house' places?"

Professor McGonagall blinked. It was a question not often asked by a student.

"Well, usually not." – She replied. "The location of your dormitories has to remain secret."

"You mean to say that one house member can not visit another in his other house?"

"No, he won't be able to enter it. It is protected as you will see."

"Sounds cool!" – Cassie said the usual devious flames in her eyes.

"As I was saying, there are four houses, which are called Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin. Each house has its noble history and each has produced outstanding wizards and witches. While you are at Hogwarts, your triumphs will earn your house points, while any rule breaking will lose house points. At the end of the year, the house with most points is awarded the House Cup, which is a great honor. I hope each of you will be a credit to whichever house becomes yours.

The sorting ceremony will begin shortly before the rest of the school." – Professor McGonagall said, and then quickly added. "I shall return when we are ready for you. Wait quietly here." – And she left the chamber.

"How do you suppose they make the sorting?" – Neville asked.

"I heard it's some kind of test." – Ron replied.

"No, it isn't. " – Harry said. "They place the sorting hat and it determines in which house you go."

"Are you sure?" – Ron asked.

"Yes, relax." – Harry smiled.

"How do you know this?" – Hermione asked.

"I told him. My mom's been here and she told me all about it." – Alamar inserted.

Then something happened that made them jump into the air. About twenty ghosts have just streamed through the wall. Pearly-white and slightly transparent, they glided across the room talking to one another not taking notice of the students below them. They were arguing. A fat monk was just saying: "We should give him another chance..."

"My dear Friar, we have given Peeves all the chance he deserves! He's giving us all a bad name and..." – The ghost suddenly noticed the students. He was wearing a ruff and tights.

"New students?" – The Friar exclaimed. "Soon to be sorted?" – Nobody answered. "Well, hope to see you in Hufflepuff. My old house you know."

"Move along now." – McGonagall's sharp voice echoed. "The sorting ceremony is beginning."

One by one the ghosts left straight through the opposite wall.

"Now, form a line and follow me." – Professor McGonagall said.

The line formed following the professor out of the chamber, back across the hall and through a pair of double doors into the Great Hall.

Harry couldn't have imagined the Great Hall of being so odd and splendid in the same time. Thousands of candles were floating in mid air above four long tables, where the rest of the students were sitting. On the tables were glittering golden plates and goblets. At the top of the hall, there was another long table, where the teachers sat. Professor McGonagall led them up here, so that they stopped facing the other students, with the teachers behind them. The hundreds of faces staring at them looked like pale lanterns in the flickering candlelight. Shining spots here and there among the students were the ghosts. Harry looked up at the ceiling, where he noticed a velvet black ceiling dotted with stars, which as he remembered from History of Magic was bewitched to look like the night sky and soon after heard Hermione telling it to Neville.

Harry looked down in time to see Professor McGonagall place the four-legged stool in front of the first years on the top of which stood a patched, frayed and extremely dirty pointy wizard hat.

For a complete second, there was perfect silence then the hat twitched. A rip near the brim appeared and the hat sang:

"Oh, you may not think I'm pretty,

But don't judge on what you see,

I'll eat myself if you can find a smarter hat than me.

You can keep your bowlers black,

Your top hats sleek and tall,

For I am the Hogwarts Sorting Hat

And I can cap them all.

There's nothing hidden in your head

The sorting hat can't see,

So try me on and I will tell you

Where you ought to be.

You might belong in Gryffindor,

Where dwell the brave at heart,

Their daring, nerve, and chivalry Set Gryffindors apart;

You might belong in Hufflepuff,

Where they are just and loyal,

Those patient Hufflepuffs are true and unafraid of toil;

Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,

If you're a ready mind,

Where those of wit and learning will always find their kind;



Or perhaps in Slytherin,

You'll make your real friends,

Those cunning folk use any means to achieve their ends.

So put me on! Don't be afraid!

And don't get in a flap!

You're in safe hands (though I have none)

For I'm a Thinking Hat!"

The whole hall burst in applause as the hat finished its song. It bowed to each table and then became quite still again.

Professor McGonagall stepped forward holding a long roll of parchment.

"When I call your name, I will place the hat upon you and you'll be sorted." – She said. "Abbott Hannah."

A pink-faced girl with pigtails stumbled out of the line, sat down while the Professor placed the hat on her that fell right down over her eyes. The next moment – "HUFFLEPUFF", the Hat had shouted.

The table on the right cheered as Hannah joined them. Harry then ignored the rest of the sorting (which continued with shouts of Ravenclaw and Slytherin) since usually he was picked last as it was in his first year of pre-school. That had decided that despite them being wizards they had to attend a muggle school. The results were good but Alamar and Harry did manage accidentally, of course, to change the color of the teacher's hair, several times.

"Darkstone, Alamar." – The professor called.

Harry turned around in time to see Alamar sitting on the stool. The hat took about a minute to decide but then shouted – "Hufflepuff!" Harry cheered with the rest of the Hufflepuffs.

Then the first Gryffindor came – "Finnigan, Seamus", a sandy-haired boy and then "Granger, Hermione."

The hat shouted: "Gryffindor", Ron groaned.

Then "Malfoy, Draco." - Draco swaggered forward. The hat barely touched his head when it shouted – "Slytherin."

And at last his name came in – "Potter, Harry." A whisper crossed the hall – "Did she say Potter?"

Harry ignored the whispers and sat on the stool. The hat fell over him. He was looking at the black inside of the hat. He waited.

"Hmm," – A small voice said in his ear. "Very difficult is going to be." – It seemed the hat was frustrated if that were possible. "Plenty of courage and skill, I see. There's talent – oh my goodness, yes, great talent, indeed great and what is this..." – The voice trailed off, then continued with a barely audible whisper, "...and a good mind, now that's interesting...very interesting...yes...and a destiny to fulfill, and a will of steel, and a loyal heart, very interesting but where to put you...yes where?"

Harry gripped the edge of the stool and thought "Wherever you want just not in Slytherin."

"Not in Slytherin, eh?" – The small voice said. "Are you sure? You could be great, you know, it's all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on your way to greatness –there's no doubt about it but on other hand you could do great in the other houses too. Hmm, very difficult and..."

Harry, this time, forced his thoughts to be louder. "You're not going to recite all the houses now and all their good sides are you? I don't want to be in Slytherin. I don't where I really belong but by Mortis one thing is for sure I'm not going to this wretched house where you've put that bloody dark lord."

The hat, to say the least, was surprised of this statement, because it had never before encountered a student with a talent for a particular house and such an adamant refusal for it. But the boy possessed qualities that could be valid for all the houses, which made the decision even harder. Also it was the first time; the hat had taken so long to decide. But, at the end, the boy certainly possessed most of

the skills that belonged to Gryffindor so it made its decision: "Well, better be - GRYFFINDOR"

Harry heard the hat shout the last word to the entire hall. He got off the chair and noticed that he was receiving the loudest cheer yet. It shook him quite a bit but he reached the Gryffindor table, where Percy the Prefect shook his hand, while the twins were yelling "We've got Potter. We've got Potter," which made him smile.

Harry looked at the High Table, which he could now see clearly. And there in the center, in a large golden chair, sat Albus Dumbledore. Harry recognized him at once. Dumbledore's silver hair was the only thing shining as brightly as the ghosts in the whole hall. And now there were only four people left to be sorted.

"Solmyr, Cassie." – Professor McGonagall announced.

Cassie sat on the stool. The hat took about a minute to decide when it shouted "SLYTHERIN." The Slytherin table cheered.

"Solmyr, Xsi."

Xsi sat too on the stool and waited. The hat announced almost immediately "RAVENCLAW." Harry cheered with the rest of the Ravensclaws.

It was then Ron's turn. He put on the hat, and shortly after it shouted "Gryffindor." Ron came by and sat near Harry smiling. The last was Zabini, Blaise, who was sorted into Slytherin. Professor McGonagall rolled the scroll and took the stool away.

Harry looked down at his plate realizing how hungry he really was. It seemed ages have past since the little snacks in the train.

Albus Dumbledore had gotten up beaming at the students. "Welcome to Hogwarts! Welcome to a new year! Now before we begin our delightful feast, I'd like to say a few words and those words are Nitwit, Blubber, Oddment, Tweak! Thank you!"

The hall burst into applause while Harry was not sure whether to laugh or not.

"He's a bit crazy, isn't he?" – Harry turned to Percy.

"Crazy?" – Percy said airily. "He's a genius! Best wizard in the world! But he's a bit crazy, yes. Potatoes, Harry?"

Harry's jaw fell. The dishes in front of him were now piled with food. He was seeing all the things he liked to eat though not all on the same table: roast beef and chicken, pork and lamb chops, sausages, bacon, steak, boiled and roast potatoes, fries, peas and carrots, gravy, and ketchup. Harry piled up his plate with a bit of everything and began to eat. It was all too delicious.

"That looks delicious." – The ghost with the ruff suddenly said watching Harry cutting his chicken.

"Can't you...?"

"I haven't eaten for nearly four hundred years." – The ghost replied sadly. "Of course, I don't need to now but one does miss these things. I don't think I've introduced myself – Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington at your service, resident ghost of Gryffindor Tower. "

"I know who you are." – Ron suddenly cut in. "My brothers told me about you – you're nearly headless Nick."

"I would prefer being called Sir Nicholas de Mimsy...." – The ghost began swiftly but was interrupted by Seamus Finnigan.

"Nearly headless? How can one be nearly headless?"

"Like this." – The ghost said irritated and seizing his left ear pulled. His head swung off his neck and fell onto his shoulder as if it was on a hinge. Someone had obviously tried to behead him but hadn't quite succeeded. Looking obviously pleased at the stunned looks on their faces he put his head back. "So – new Gryffindors, I hope you're going to help us this year win the house cup. Gryffindors have never gone so long without winning. Slytherins have got the cup six years in a row now. The bloody Baron's becoming unbearable – he's the Slytherin ghost."

Harry looked over the Slytherin table and saw the ghost sitting there, with blank staring eyes, a gaunt face and robes stained with silver blood. He was sitting right next to Malfoy who seemed not be very happy of the sitting arrangement.

When Harry had eaten as much as he could, the remains of the food vanished only to be replaced by blocks of ice cream in every flavor, apple pies, treacle tarts, chocolate éclairs and jam doughnuts, trifle, strawberries, and Jell-O.

The conversation on the table has turned to their families. The sand-haired boy was just saying that he was half and half given his father was a muggle and got quite the shock when he learnt his wife was a witch, which made the others laugh.

"What about you, Neville?" – Ron asked.

"Well, my Gran brought me up and she's a witch." – Neville replied. "But the family thought I was a muggle for a time. My great uncle Algie kept trying to catch me off guard and force the magic out of me. He had pushed in a lake and I nearly drowned but nothing happened till I reached eight. Uncle was hanging me out by the ankle over the balcony when my grant aunt Enid offered him a meringue and he accidentally let go. But fortunately I bounced all the way down to the garden. They were all so pleased, Gran was crying, she was so happy, and Grant Uncle Algie bought me the toad."

On Harry's other side, Percy and Hermione were talking already about lessons ("I hope we start right away, there's so much to learn, I've particular interest in Transfiguration, and you know turning something into something else." – "You'll be starting small, just matches into needles and that sort of thing-")

Harry, who was starting to feel warm and sleepy, looked up at the High Table. Professor McGonagall was talking to Professor Dumbledore. Then he noticed a wizard with an absurd turban on his head. He remembered him from the Leaky Cauldron, on the day of his birthday, when he went to Diagon Alley. He also remembered Thant's reaction, which meant that he had to be extra careful. He was talking to another wizard with greasy black hair, a hooked nose and sallow skin.

It happened very suddenly. The hook-nosed wizard looked past the turban straight into Harry's eyes – and a sharp, hot pain shot across Harry's scar.

"Ouch!" – Harry clapped a hand to his forehead.

"What is it?" – Percy asked.

"Nothing." – Harry lied.

The pain had gone quickly but harder proved to shake the feeling he had gotten from the teacher's look – it seemed he didn't like him at all.

"Who are those teachers?" – Harry asked turning to Percy pointing at the wizard with turban and the one with the greasy hair.

"Oh, well, the one with the turban is Professor Quirrell. He teaches Defense against the Dark Arts. No wonder he's looking nervous. That's Professor Snape beside him. He teaches Potions, but everyone knows he's after Quirrell's job. People say he knows awfully much about the Dark Arts. He's the head of Slytherin house too." – Percy explained.

At last, the deserts all disappeared, and Professor Dumbledore got up. The hall went silent.

"Ahem – just a few more words now that we are all fed and watered. I have a few start-of-term notices to give you. First years do take note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all pupils. And few of our older students should do well to remember that as well." – Dumbledore's twinkling eyes flashed in the direction of the Weasley's twins.

"Also Mr. Filch, our caretaker, has asked me to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors. Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of the term. Anyone interested to play for his house, please contact Madam Hooch. And finally, this year, the third-floor corridor on the right hand side is strictly forbidden to all who does not wish to die a very painful death."

Seamus laughed, but he was one of the few that did.

"What, he isn't serious, is he?"

"Must be." – Percy answered, frowning at Dumbledore. "It's odd, because they usually give us a reason why we're not allowed to go

somewhere – the forest's full of dangerous beasts, everyone knows that. I do think he should have told us prefects at least."

"Now, all to bed. Off you lot."

The Gryffindors first years followed Percy through the crowd, out of the Great Hall, and up the marble staircase. Percy led them through doorways hidden behind sliding panels and hanging tapestries. They climbed more staircases, yawning and dragging their feet, and Harry started wondering how much further they would go when suddenly Percy came to a halt.

A bundle of walking sticks were floating in mid air ahead of them, and as Percy took a step toward them they started throwing themselves at him.

"Peeves," – Percy whispered, "He's a poltergeist." He raised his voice. "Peeves, show yourself."

A loud, rude sound, like the air being let out of a balloon, answered.

"Do you want to meet with the Bloody Baron?"

There was a pop, and a little man with wicked, dark eyes and a wide opened mouth appeared, floating cross-legged in the air, clutching the walking sticks.

"Ooooooh!" – He said with an evil cackle. "Ickle Firsties! What fun?"

He swooped at them. They had to duck.

"Go away, Peeves, or the Baron will hear about it." – Percy barked.

Peeves stuck out his tongue and vanished, dropping the walking sticks at Neville's head. They heard him zooming away, rattling coats of armor as he passed.

"You want to watch out for Peeves." – Percy said, as they set off again. "Only the Blood Baron can control him. He doesn't listen to us, prefects. Ah, here we are."

At the very end of the corridor, a portrait hung. It was of a very fat woman with pink silk dress.

"Password?" – She asked.

"Caput Draconis." – Percy replied, and portrait swung forward revealing a round hole in the wall. They all scrambled in and found themselves in the Gryffindor common room, a cozy, round room full of squashy armchairs.

"Now, this is the Gryffindor common room. Girls' dormitories are on the left and boys on the right. You'll notice that your entire luggage has been already brought up. Good night!"

Harry and the rest of the boys climbed up the spiral staircase – obviously being in one of the towers – finding their beds at last – five four-posters hung with deep red, velvet curtains. Too tired to talk much, they pulled on their pajamas and fell into bed. Harry wanted to ask Ron something but instead fell fast asleep.

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven



## Chapter 7

### Challenge

The moment, Harry had left his dormitory whispers had him followed – "There look, the one with the glasses, or did you see his scar," Harry only wished he wasn't hearing them but they were after him everywhere. People lining up outside classrooms were standing on tip toe just to get a look on him, as he remembered he is the Boy Who Lived and everyone wanted to have a good look on him, which soon became really annoying, but it was something as Harry thought he had to get used to. Of course, this also became a problem, because he was loosing concentration in finding his way through this labyrinth of a castle.

Hogwarts was huge. It had a hundred and forty-two staircases. Some were wide or sweeping; others were narrow or rickety; some led somewhere only on Fridays; some had a vanishing step halfway up so one had to remember to jump it. Then there were the doors – some wouldn't open if not asked politely, or trickled in a precise point, and some doors that weren't doors at all but merely looked like ones as in fact were solid walls. It was a bit difficult to digest all these as everything around in the castle seemed to have the habit to move a lot. The people in portraits also had the same habit. They made visits to their neighbors. Also Harry had stayed with the distinct impression that the coats of armor could walk.

The ghosts weren't of any help. It could be a really nasty shock when one of them was to walk through the very same door you're trying to open. The only ghost that was happy to help was Nearly Headless Nick while Peeves, the poltergeist, was a big obstacle worth two locked doors and a trick staircase, especially if students were late for class. He would pull the rugs from underneath the feet, pelt with chalks or his specialty sneaking behind, invisible, grabbing the nose, and screeching – "GOT YOU BY THE CONK!"

But worse than Peeves, if that was possible, was the caretaker Argus Filch. Harry and Ron managed to get on the wrong foot with him on their first morning. They were trying to force their way through a door unluckily being the entrance to the out-of-bounds corridor on the third floor. Filch wouldn't believe them they were lost being sure they were trying to break in on purpose, and thus was

threatening them to lock them into the dungeons, when they were rescued by the passing Professor Quirrell.

Filtch also had another ally – his cat Mrs. Norris, a scrawny, dust colored creature with bulging, almost lamp like eyes. She was patrolling the corridors alone, but break a rule in front of her and she would whisk off for Filtch who would appear two seconds later. Filtch knew all the secret passageways better than anyone (except the Weasley Twins) and could pop-up suddenly just as any of the ghosts. All students hated him and their dearest wish was to give Mrs. Norris a good kick.

And then, once you had managed to cross the labyrinth, there were the classes. There was a lot of magic, as all quickly found out, than simply waving your wand and saying some funny words.

The students had to study the stars on the night sky, learning their names and tracking their movements, every Wednesday. Three times a week they went into the Greenhouses behind the castle to study Herbology, with a dumpy little witch called Professor Sprout, learning how to take care of strange plants and what their uses were.

The most boring class was said to be History of Magic. It was thought by Professor Binns who was so old. One day he had fallen asleep in front of the staff room fireplace. He had gotten up the next morning to teach class while he had simply left his body behind thus being the only ghost teacher. But Harry enjoyed this class because everything related to the history of magic was fascinating although he did admit that the material could be presented better by another teacher who did not speak in just one tone.

Charms were the class Harry was looking forward to. It was taught by a tiny little wizard, Professor Flitwick, which had to put a pile of books just to see over his desk. At the very first day, the professor took the roll call, and when he reached Harry's name gave an excited squeak and fell off the pile. In the first year, as the professor explained, they were going to learn to levitate objects, which fascinated not only Harry but Hermione Granger who seemed to be fascinated by everything and eager to assimilate all that she could if possible in a nick.

Transfiguration was a very different class. Professor McGonagall was, as Harry had thought the first time he saw her, a teacher not to

be crossed with. She was strict and clever. She gave them a lecturing speech the moment they sat in her first class.

"Transfiguration is some of the most complex and dangerous magic you will learn at Hogwarts. Anyone messing it up in my class will leave and not come back. You've been warned."

Then she changed her desk into a cow and back again. Harry could understand now Xsi's fascination better. All students were very impressed and couldn't wait to get started but soon came to the realization that they weren't going to be changing the furniture into animals for a long time. After taking in a lot of complicated notes, they were given each a match and started trying to change it into a needle.

Harry found that transfiguration was indeed hard but not impossible when one is concentrating enough. Harry succeeded unexpectedly to change his on his sixth attempt, which managed to frustrate Hermione and the others a lot. But by the end of the class, Hermione also managed to change hers. Professor McGonagall, on the other side, was surprised when Harry succeeded so quickly, actually she couldn't remember any student in the last thirty years to have ever succeeded in doing it so fast so she gave him and Hermione one of her rare smiles and awarded Gryffindor with twenty points, ten each.

Defense against the Dark Arts, taught by Professor Quirrell turned out to be a joke. The classroom smelled deeply of garlic, as explained it was because the professor had met a vampire on his trips and was trying to get rid of him. His turban, as he told them, was a gift from an African Prince he had helped getting rid of a troublesome zombie but when asked how he had done so by Seamus Finnigan, Quirrell went pink and started talking about the weather. Also there was a funny smell coming off his turban, which the Twins speculated was full of garlic so the professor is protected wherever he went.

Finally, Friday came. It was an important day for Harry and Ron for they've managed to find their way to the Great Hall without getting lost once.

"What do we have today?" – Harry asked Ron.

"Double potions with the Slytherins." – Ron replied. "Snape is the head of the Slytherin House. They say he always favors them – we'll be able to see if that's true."

"Wish McGonagall favored us too." – Harry said. Professor McGonagall was the head of Gryffindor house but this didn't stop her from giving them a pile of homework the day before.

Just then the mail arrived. Hedwig landed before Harry with two letters. Harry recognized the first being written by Thant's heavy writing while the second was from Hagrid, the caretaker of Keys and Grounds of Hogwarts who had stalked him once while getting out of the Great Hall. He had told him that he knew him and his parents, and would be delighted if Harry stopped some time to visit him. Thant's letter was short but made Harry smile. Thant was saying how happy he is of his achievements for this week, as Harry had written a letter flashing out all that had happened so far. Hagrid on the other side was inviting him to his hut after the classes.

Harry was thrilled to spend the afternoon with Hagrid. Potions turned out to be a head-to-head challenge with Snape, but one that took an unexpected turn.

Potions took place down in one of the dungeons. It was colder than up in the castle but Harry was used to cold places – Solmyr castle being the perfect example. The classroom was also a bit freaky given pickled animals stored in glass jars around the walls.

Snape, just like Flitwick, started the class by taking the roll call, and like Flitwick, paused at Harry's name.

"Ah, yes, "– He said softly. "Harry Potter, our new – celebrity."

Draco Malfoy and his friends Crabbe and Goyle sniggered behind their hands while Cassie looked at them and Harry distinctly saw the familiar mischief growing in her eyes. Snape finished calling up the names and looked up at the class. His eyes were black but had no warmth in them. They were cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels.

"You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion making." – Snape began. He spoke in barely more than a whisper, but they caught every word – like McGonagall, Snape had the gift of

keeping a class silent without effort. "As there is little foolish wand-waving here, many of you will hardly believe that it is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses...I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even put a stopper to death – if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach."

More silence fell after this little speech. Hermione Granger was on the edge of her seat looking desperate to start proving herself.

"Potter!" – Snape said suddenly. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

Hermione's hand shot into the air, which got everyone the nerve. Harry, on the other hand, exchanged looks with Cassie who lifted both forefingers for luck. Harry took a deep breath.

"You would obtain a sleeping potion that is very powerful, as it is known as the Draught of the Living Death." – Harry replied with casual tone though a bit stuttering given the staring of Snape.

Snape's facial expression was difficult to tell but the widening of his eyes gave up that the Professor was not expecting an answer. But Snape apparently had not finished thus shot his next question.

"Where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar and what does it do?"

"A bezoar is a stone taken from the stomach of a goat and can save us of most poisons, sir." – Harry replied after taking a small time to remember.

Snape expression remained still. He had not expected the boy to know anything, yet he was answering correctly and very politely, which he had to admit unwillingly.

"What is the difference, Potter, between monkshood and wolfsbane?"

Harry recalled he has been reading about those just the last day of August before joining his family down the hall.

"There isn't because they are the same plant also known as aconite, which would be also a very poisonous plant, sir."

Snape had become frustrated with the boy's knowledge so he decided to lift the bar.

"Polyjuice Potion?"

"The Polyjuice potion allows transfiguration. It is usually used by wizards for covert operations. One dose of it lasts for an hour but can be renewed to keep the effect. To create the Polyjuice potion one would require – lacewing flies stewed for twenty-one days, powdered bicorn horns, knotgrass, fluxweed picked at full moon, shredded boomslang skin, leeches and a bit of the one who you would want to turn into. But as it is a very complex potion it is recommended to be used with caution otherwise it might have unpleasant consequences. The potion is not used to transfigure oneself into anything other than the original form – people into people, and not people into animals or inanimate objects, sir." – Harry replied to the astonishment of all. "And it is very unlikely a student would be able to brew it given its complexity so it's best to be left into the professional hands of a potion master."

This time, Snape was impressed. He had to admit it to himself willy-nilly. The boy's knowledge was remarkable. He also had the distinct impression that Harry would answer him every time, which reminded him of someone.

Snape looked at Harry intently but did not see the arrogance of James Potter instead he saw the softness of Lily. The boy has been very polite and respectful while giving his answers. There was no sign of superiority in his voice one he would expect from the son of James Potter so Snape decided to watch him very carefully. He had also noticed the impatience of a girl – Hermione Granger that seemed to be a know-it-all.

"Give it rest." – Snape snapped at Hermione who dropped her hand at once. Snape looked at the class and snapped. "Why weren't you all writing down what Potter said?"

The class took out their quills and parchment and started writing down.

"And Potter, you've just won your house the first ten points." – Snape added, which made Ron and Malfoy's jaws to fall. Harry gave a thankful look at Snape, which seemed to please him.

Snape divided them into pairs and set to mix up a simple potion to cure boils. He moved around in his long black cloak, watching them weight dried nettles and crash snake fangs, criticizing all that weren't doing it correctly, except for Harry, Cassie and especially Malfoy who was apparently his favorite. He was just saying to everyone to look how well Malfoy has stewed his horned slugs when a cloud of acid green smoke and a loud hissing filled the dungeon. Neville had somehow managed to melt down Seamus's cauldron, and their potion was seeping across the floor. Within seconds, the whole class was sitting on their chairs while Neville, who had been drenched into the potion, moaned in pain as red boils sprang up all over his arms and legs.

"Idiotic boy." – Snape snarled, cleaning everything with a single wave of his wand. "I suppose you added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off the fire?"

Neville whimpered as boils started to pop-up all over his face.

"Take him to the hospital wing." – Snape spat at Seamus. "And you, Granger." – Snape snapped suddenly, "Why didn't you tell him not to add the quills? Thought perhaps that everyone could see how smart you were, heh? Gryffindor losses five points."

Hermione turned red and was on the verge of crying. Snape was indeed cruel at times. The thought that Gryffindor had won ten points in the very first minutes of the lesson was intoxicating but now it was cooled down. The Gryffindors felt like they've lost ten points more than that they've got five points left of Snape's sudden generosity towards Harry.

"He is cruel, isn't he?" – Ron asked Harry when they left the classroom.

"Yeah, he is." – Harry replied while waiting outside. "Hey, Cassie."

"Hey, Harry. It was an interesting class, don't you think?"

"Yeah, except for the last part of it." – Harry replied.

"Yeah." – Cassie agreed. "It wasn't fair. But as I have learnt Professor Snape can be very cruel."

Harry shrugged and went away with Ron still discussing the lesson.

"Could I come with you and meet Hagrid?" – Ron asked then.

"Sure." – Harry answered.

Hermione burst out of the classroom but stopped as Cassie stood right in front of her.

"Don't take it at heart! Professor Snape tends to be somewhat cruel especially with Gryffindors." – Cassie said to reassure Hermione who was surprised to see a Slytherin girl speaking to her.

"Thank you but apparently not with every Gryffindor." – She said while motioning at the moving away Harry.

"Yeah, it is a surprise and not only for you. I'm Cassie by the way."

"Hermione, Hermione Granger."

"Nice to meet you. What are you doing this afternoon?"

"Hmm, I don't know – studying I guess." – Hermione replied.

"Hmm, why don't you come with me and meet my sister Xsi? She has some interesting ideas about the free period." – Cassie proposed.

Hermione pondered for a moment then smiled. "Okay."

"Great. Meet us in an hour at the entrance of the Great Hall. See you then." – Cassie wished and went away.

At three o'clock, the students came onto the grounds, as they had free time. Cassie and Xsi were waiting for Hermione at the entrance of the Great Hall. They saw Harry and Ron going in the direction of the forest.



"Where are they going?" – Xsi asked.

"I don't know but I don't think they would be going into the forest." – Cassie shrugged.

"Yeah, probably." – Xsi smiled.

"Ah, there she is." – Cassie said pointing.

Hermione was coming. Xsi eyed the girl with curiosity because as Cassie had said this girl was quite the smart one – her competition, as Saptienna always said it was good to know your opponents in whatever matter.

"Hey, Hermione." – Cassie called.

"Hello, Cassie." – Hermione responded.

"Hermione, this is my sister – Xsi. Xsi, this is Hermione." – Cassie introduced.

"Hello." – Xsi said.

"Hello." – Hermione said.

"So, Xsi, what did you have in mind?" – Cassie asked.

"Well, I was hoping that we could examine the grounds of the castle. I mean we're going to be here for seven years. It'd be nice to know as much as possible about the castle. All the entrances in and out of the castle, I mean you never know what could happen. And, a castle as big as Hogwarts, is bound to have secret passageways hopefully no one knows about." – Xsi explained diplomatically.

"Ah, Xsi, Xsi, always in pursuit of knowledge." – Cassie commented.

"If you are in ready mind, then Ravenclaw is for you." – Xsi recited.

"Knowing more than the rest, as usual." – Cassie teased, and then turned to Hermione to explain. "She is always like this."

"Oh, well, it is alright to pursue knowledge. But are we allowed to do so?" – Hermione said.

"Well, there is no sanction against one wanting to learn, now is there?" – Xsi demanded.

"Yes, but if I understand you, you want to study the castle inside out or rather the other way around. And I don't think it is allowed." – Hermione said.

"Are you always by the rules?"- Xsi eyed her.

"Well, yes. The rules are important. That's why they exist to put order to chaos." – Hermione explained.

"No, rules are made by those who wish to avoid them. That's why there are always exceptions to the rules." – Xsi countered.

"Oy, you two – give it a rest." – Cassie intervened. "You're starting to give me a headache. We're not here in the middle of a sparing match. We are here to have fun. Now, Hermione, would it not be best to know more about this place than it is written in the books? In the books, you don't get everything. It is incomplete. How do you think people would perceive us if we were to give them a more accurate vision of the place. In this way we are actually going to help while having fun."

"Well," – Hermione hesitated for a moment. "If you are putting it this way, then I agree."

"See." – Cassie said turning to Xsi. "It is how you present your offer not how much you know about it that counts."

"Okay. Gee, give it a rest, sis." – Xsi said irritated.

"Now, where do you start?" – Cassie asked.

"We could pass by the entrance of the castle and go around." – Hermione proposed.

"That a girl." – Cassie approved. "Let's go."

Meanwhile, Harry and Ron headed towards Hagrid's hut near the Forbidden Forest. Hagrid waited for them outside and when they came near he waved at them.

"Hey' Harry!" – Hagrid called.

"Hello, Hagrid." – Harry responded.

"How's the firs' week?" – Hagrid asked all beaming.

"Great so far." – Harry replied. "Oh, Hagrid, this is Ron Weasley."

"Weasley?" – Hagrid asked eyeing Ron. "I've been keeping your brothers out of the Forest too many times I care to remember."

"Yeah, they always liked to cause trouble." – Ron said.

"Well, com'in." – Hagrid gestured.

The hut was small with only one room. There were few animals, which Harry recognized as hams and pheasants hanging from the ceiling. Over the fire, a cooper kettle was gently boiling. And on the corner, there was a newspaper, the wizard newspaper – Daily's Prophet with the big heading – "Investigations continue on the break-in at Gringotts at July 31, which is believed to be the work of Dark Wizards or witches not known."

The article continued with – "Gringotts goblins today insisted that nothing was taken as the vault in question was emptied earlier the same day.

'But we're not telling you what was inside because our policy is to keep it confidential, so stick your noses out of it, if you know what's best for you.' – A Gringotts spokegoblin commented this afternoon. "

Harry suddenly remembered that he was going to tell Ron about vault 713 in the train when they were interrupted by Draco and his monkeys. But shockingly it was done by dark wizards, which made him think of Quirrell. As Thant suspected he was a dark wizard or his servant. He wondered what was in that vault.

Hagrid had noticed that Harry was looking at the newspaper but he avoided looking in the boy's eyes.

"Hey, Ron." – Harry suddenly said. "You were telling me that someone had broken in Gringotts while we were in the train but you could have told me the date."

"What? Oh, why?"

"July 31 is my birthday. I was there with Thant. Phew, it could have happened while I was there." – Harry replied then turning to Hagrid asked. "What do you think, Hagrid, could it be the work of dark wizards?"

Hagrid, just like Quirrell, went a bit pink and changed the subject, which did not go unnoticed but Harry decided not to press the matter, for now.

The following week was most interesting. On the Monday morning, the Gryffindors noticed a little sign pinned into the Gryffindor Tower saying – Flying lessons will begin Thursday – teacher Professor Hooch. The bad news was that this class they would have to share with Slytherin.

"Finally." – Harry said. He had been looking forward to learn flying. He only hoped he wouldn't make a fool of himself but Ron managed to calm him.

"Don't worry, Harry. You can't possibly know before you've tried." – Ron had said.

"Yeah but I was hoping not be in front of Malfoy." – Harry had countered.

"Don't mind that brat though he professes he knows how to fly and that he's been doing it as little all the time." – Ron had answered. "We'll see this big mouth."

Truth to be said, Malfoy did profess all around the school how good he is. He also complained about the rule for the first year students not been allowed to play Quidditch for their houses. Actually, Cassie and Xsi happened to agree with him on that one. But they were not the only ones talking about Quidditch – actually everyone was talking about it. Only Neville Longbottom was not but it was mainly because his grandmother would not allow him and Harry suspected

why – Neville had the extraordinary gift to get into trouble even with his feet firmly on the ground.

On the other hand, Hermione was also very nervous because it seemed that books in this area helped only a little. However, she had read all books regarding the matter thus managing to get on the nerve of everyone. And in the end, Harry had asked, no, begged Cassie and Xsi to do something about it, which the girls accepted in a nick.

On Wednesday, they took Hermione away. Hermione was wondering what these two were up to.

"Where are you taking me to?" – She asked after walking for some time.

"You'll see." – Xsi replied with mischief in her eyes.

"Relax, Hermione."- Cassie tried to calm her down. "Harry just asked us to help you in one matter."

This reassurance however did not have the effect that was intended. Hermione got scared a lot as soon, the girls reached outside and headed behind the castle, near the Greenhouses. There Cassie broke off the group but returned shortly after with two broomsticks. Hermione eyed the broomsticks with fear.

"What are you going to do?"

"Relax. We're going to teach you to fly." – Cassie replied.

"And you know how?"

"Oh, yes, this is one of our favorite sports." – Xsi replied happily.

"And does Harry fly also?"

"Well, truth to be said, we don't know. We never were able to make him." – Cassie replied.

"Just relax and don't be afraid. We'll help you." – Xsi said.

The next morning, at breakfast, Harry and Ron were almost impatient for the flying lessons. Hedwig had just dropped a letter from Saptienna telling him not the fear the broom but the other way around – the broom should fear him. Harry tried to assimilate this notion but gave up as he did not understand it.

Neville also had a delivery this day. His grandmother had sent him a small package. It contained a glass ball as big as marble. Neville explained to his friends given their wide expressions.

"Oh, this is called Remembrall! Gran knows that I always forget something. This ball will turn red if you have forgotten something. Like now." – Neville added when the ball did turn red. "The only problem is that I can't remember what I've forgotten."

Everyone laughed because it happened to be true. Neville's memory was like an old book.

At three thirty, all Gryffindors hurried up to the castle grounds opposite of the Dark Forest where their first flying lesson was going to take place. The day was nice with slight but gentle breeze, and the grass rippled under their feet as they walked. They noticed that the Slytherins were already there, and so were twenty broomsticks. Cassie winked at Hermione for courage.

Madam Hooch, their teacher arrived shortly after. She had short, gray hair and eyes as yellow as a hawk.

"Good afternoon, class." – She greeted. "Now, what are you waiting for? Step on the left side of your brooms. Come on, hurry up."

All stood where Madam Hooch told them.

"Now, stick out your right hand over the broom and say 'UP'" – Madam Hooch said.

And everyone shouted – "UP!"

Harry's broom obeyed him immediately, as did Cassie's, Hermione's and Malfoy's. Neville's broom remained on the ground. He was too scared of the thing so naturally it did not obey him. Ron also had problems with his but on the third attempt the broom came to his hand.

Then Madam Hooch showed them how to mount properly the brooms, and as Harry and Ron noticed with satisfaction seemed that Malfoy had been doing it wrong for years.

"Now, quiet. When I blow my whistle, you kick off hard of the ground." – Madam Hooch said. "You'll rise a few feet. Remember to keep your broom steady. You will hover for a moment then you are going to lean slightly forward and back to the ground. Understood?" – Everyone nodded. "Good then on my whistle 3, 2..."

Unfortunately, Neville was too nervous and did not wait for the signal. He pushed off the ground hard.

"Come down, boy, at once." – Madam Hooch barked. But Neville's broom was rising and rising then like a bullet shot around passing by the nearest tower. Everyone looked at Neville whose face had gone pale white as he was trying to remain on the broom. The broom looked quite rogue. It zigzagged around crazily, crashing into walls trying to get rid of its unwanted passenger and then while passing by a statue with a pike, Neville's robe got stuck and he hung, and then – WHAM – a thud and a nasty crack, and poor Neville was lying facedown on the grass in a heap. His broomstick, however, saw seen vanishing in the direction of the Dark Forest. Madam Hooch was, now, bending over Neville, her face as white as his, checking him out.

"Oh, dear, tut, tut a broken wrist. Not to worry, boy. It's alright. I'll take you to the hospital wing." – Then Madam Hooch turned to the rest of the class. "Don't move while I show this boy to the hospital wing. If I see a single broom in the air, the one riding will find himself out of Hogwarts before he can say – Quidditch."

No sooner they were out of earshot, Malfoy burst into laughter.

"Did you see his face? Stupid fatty." – Some of the Slytherins joined in.

"Oh, shut up, Malfoy." – Parvati Patil said.

"Oh, sticking out for Longbottom." – A long faced, Slytherin girl, Pansy Parkinson barked. "I did not think you'd fall for him, Parvati."

"Oh, shut it, big doll." – Cassie intervened.

"Sticking out for the Gryffins, are we?"

"Be careful, Pansy. Be very careful." – Cassie said in almost audible whisper but filled with such a coldness Harry had never heard. It seemed that those two did not like each other much. Pansy said nothing but retreated.

Malfoy on the other hand ignored the girls and picked up a small ball from the grass where Neville was lying before.

"Oh, it's that stupid thing his granny sent him."

"Give it back, Draco." – Harry said quietly.

"No, I don't think so, Potter." – Draco smiled nastily. "I think I would leave it somewhere – let's say up a tree so this lump can get it..."

"Give it back," – Harry had increased slightly his voice but the menace in it was evident but Malfoy had already lifted off. He was indeed flying well so he wasn't lying about this part. "Come and get it, Potter, if you dare."

Harry got hold of his broom. Hermione tried to stop him but Cassie caught her by the arm. "Leave him be."

"But he'll get in trouble. He'll get us all in trouble." – Hermione tried to protest.

"Leave him be. I know better. Once, Harry has made his mind, no one can stop him."

Hermione looked at her but said nothing though she did not know how Cassie and Xsi knew so much of Harry. Truth to be said, she still had not asked so logically she had no answer for it.

Harry's blood was pounding in his ears, eyes flashing dangerously. He kicked off the ground hard and soared up. The air was rushing through his hair making him realize something – flying was great. It was the only thing he had not to learn because he was doing it naturally. It was an elevating feeling. He knew somehow what to do.



He pulled his broomstick up higher and higher, hearing distantly the screams and gasps of the people below him.

Harry turned briskly his broom to face Malfoy in midair, which stunned Malfoy quite a bit.

"Give it back, Malfoy." – Harry bellowed. "Or I'll knock you off the broom."

"Oh, yeah?" – Malfoy tried to sound the way he usually did but it was evident that he was worried.

"You know, no Crabbe or Goyle up here, Malfoy. No one to watch your back or have a net down waiting to catch should you fall." – Harry mocked.

Malfoy, of course, knew all that and reconsidered quickly. He threw the Remembrall high in the air, and screeched. "Go and get it then," darting back to the safety of the ground.

Harry watched the ball rise up, as someone had bewitched time to go slower, and then falling quickly back to the ground grabbed by the undoubted force of gravity. Harry immediately responded – leaning forward, he forced his broom to dive steeply, racing with the wind and the ball, and a foot from the ground, Harry caught the ball, as he gently stretched out his hand, just in time for him to dismount the broom and step on the grass. His dive was accompanied by the screams of the people watching. Harry was so excited of this accomplishment.

"HARRY POTTER!" – Someone shouted cooling Harry's joy. He turned around and saw Professor McGonagall running towards him.

"Never in my life have I..." – The words were drowned in McGonagall's shock. "How dare you – you could have broken your neck or..."

"But Professor he tried to..." – Ron tried to intervene on behalf of Harry.

"Enough," – McGonagall cut him off. "Potter, follow me!"

Malfoy and his monkeys were triumphant – Potter finally caught in trouble. Harry had noticed their faces but he noticed also his sister – Cassie. Her eyes told him that they would soon regret it.

McGonagall strode off the castle passing classroom by classroom till they reached the cabinet of Charms. The professor opened the door.

"Excuse me, Professor Flitwick, could I borrow Wood for a moment?"

"Yes, of course." – Flitwick replied with his tiny voice.

Harry wondered what Wood was – perhaps a cane with which to punish Harry. But to his relief, Wood was a burly fifth-year boy who came out confused.

"Follow me, you two." – McGonagall said, and they followed her up the corridor, while Wood was looking curiously at Harry, who was still holding the broom and the Remembrall. "In here," – The professor said.

They entered a classroom where the only occupant was Peeves writing rude words on the board, "Out!" – McGonagall barked, and Peeves left cursing as he went.

"Potter, this is Oliver Wood. Wood, I found you a seeker."

Wood passed from confusion to delight. Now having throwing looks at Harry and examining him like with a scanner.

"This boy is a natural. I saw him catch the ball in his hand after a fifty feet dive; even Charlie Weasley couldn't have done it, without getting a scratch." – McGonagall said then turned to Harry. "This is you first time on a broomstick, Potter?"

"No, it isn't." – Harry replied. McGonagall eyed him with curiosity. "I remember doing it as an infant before my parents died."

This time McGonagall was shocked, again.

"He has the build for a seeker – light, speedy – we'll have to get him on the team. Could we find a door in the rules for first years, Professor?"

Harry looked questioningly at McGonagall who smiled and explained. "Wood is Gryffindor's captain."

"Have you ever been on a Quidditch game, Potter?" – Wood asked.

"No." – Harry replied. "But I do know the rules."

"Professor, we should get him a good broom – perhaps a Cleansweep Seven or even a Nimbus 2000."

"I shall talk to Professor Dumbledore." – McGonagall said then turned to Harry. "I want to hear that you are practicing hard or I'll change my mind about punishing you. And Potter, try to help us win or the cup will slip through our fingers for sixth year in a row, as Professor Snape gently reminded me on breakfast. I can't get to look at him, as it was last year, for days..." – Then her voice softened and she added. "Your father would have been so proud. He was an excellent player too."

So this explained his ability to fly so well, Harry thought. The news that Harry was not punished reached the ears of Malfoy who was not thrilled to hear also that Harry is now part of the Quidditch team of Gryffindor. Cassie and Xsi, on the other hand, were straight down jealous.

"I can't believe it." – Cassie said filled with jealousy.

"Neither can I." – Harry countered.

"Dad is going to send you the best broom there is – Nimbus 2000." – Xsi informed while reading Thant's letter. "He is so happy."

"Have to thank Malfoy for this." – Harry said.

"And I suppose this makes you feel great, for the breaking the rules that is?" – Hermione asked as she just arrived around the corner.

"No but still it feels great." – Harry responded.

The next day on breakfast, the Twins came to congratulate Harry. They were also on the team as beaters. Malfoy also came along with Crabbe and Goyle.

"Feeling proud, ah, Potter?" – He sneered.

"Yeah, thanks to you – so thanks!" – Harry replied.

Malfoy looked outraged but said. "It ain't over, Potter. I wonder how you would feel of a real duel. You'll probably run away."

"A duel?" – Harry asked eyeing him.

"Yes, a duel – a wizard duel with wands."

"Right. When and where?"

"Midnight in the Trophy Room."

"And who's your second?" – Ron asked joining the conversation.

Malfoy paused for a moment while deciding which of his gorillas could better fill this position and answered. "Goyle."

"I'll be there." – Harry replied defiantly but with a smile that Malfoy could not quite make.

Malfoy strode away. Hermione, however, had overheard this and intervened.

"Harry, he is trying only to get into trouble."

"I know and that's why I'll go." – Harry replied.

"But he won't be there."

"Oh, he will." – Harry said with confidence and continued his breakfast.

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 8

### Foundation

"You don't have to come with me, mate, besides Malfoy won't be there." – Harry said while descending into Gryffindor common room.

"But you said he would be." – Ron said confused, closely following Harry.

"No, he won't. He's just trying to get rid of me."

"So why are you then going?" – Ron was confused.

"I've a meeting." – Harry answered but this did not help Ron understand better actually it made him even more confused thus he asked.

"With whom?"

"With some friends of mine." – Harry replied mysteriously.

"Let me come." – Ron pleaded.

"Okay. It's half past eleven. Let's go." – Harry said looking at his watch.

They left their room but downstairs at the common room stood Hermione Granger. She was in her pink night robe.

"I can't believe you're going to do it, Harry." – She said.

"What are you doing here?" – Ron asked furiously. "Why aren't you in bed?"

Hermione, of course, ignored him and turned to Harry.

"It's really selfish of you, wandering in the castle. Are you not thinking about Gryffindor and all the points we are going to lose if you are caught and caught you will be because Malfoy never intended to fight you but rather put you in trouble?"

"One, it's not your business where I have decided to go and two I'm not going to the Trophy room therefore Malfoy's plan to get me in trouble won't work." – Harry said, quite irritated and couldn't believe there could be people so interfering.

"Then where are you going? If you are caught then..."

"Hermione, I heard you the first time and as I told you I'm not going to be caught so relax and give it a rest." – Harry said visibly irritated.

"But..."

"Uff, if you must know, I have a meeting with Cassie and Xsi."

"What? Now? Where?"

"Well, you could follow me so when we all get caught you could say the truth and get us in real trouble! Satisfied?"

"No, I'm not. Why meet them now? And what are they to you?"

"Now, that's none of your business. If they haven't told you I'm not going to either. Now, sod off or I'll be late." –Harry said and made his way to the portrait.

Hermione, of course, did not give it a rest and followed them. Along the way she continued to bug them about the rules and regulations but Harry ignored her completely. He headed towards the right hand side of the corridor on the third floor, which only increased the bugging of Hermione.

"Be quiet." – Harry snapped silently. "Or you'll get us all in trouble."

"What are we doing here, mate?" – Ron asked when he realized where they were.

"Veil Mortis." – Harry whispered in the darkness, startling both Hermione and Ron, as Harry's voice sounded deeply creepy.

"Veil Mortis, Nimbus." – Cassie replied, coming from behind a statue.

"Where is Xsi?" – Harry asked.

"She's waiting for Alamar." – Cassie replied but seeing the other two whispered so only Harry could hear her. "What are they doing here?"

"Well, they insisted in coming." – Harry explained.

"Cassie, what's going on?" – Hermione asked.

"Oh, hey, Hermione. It's a secret meeting. It's the only time in the day when we could meet without creating mass trouble in the Great Hall or anywhere in the castle. People are so prejudiced when a Gryffindor meets with a Slytherin in broad daylight and even worse when members of four houses are all together. It looks suspicious, to say the least." – Cassie explained.

"But why meet here? We're not supposed to be here."

"We're meeting here, Hermione, for exactly that reason – no one is supposed to be here therefore no one is going to disturb us." – Cassie answered.

"What about the patrolling teachers?" – Ron asked joining the conversation.

"No worries there. We have the perfect guard. We've just recruited him in our midst." – Cassie replied mysteriously.

"Who is i...on second thought I don't know to know." – Harry said.

"Don't worry, it isn't that bad." – Cassie reassured but Harry did not believe a word.

A low noise made them jump off but it was only Xsi and Alamar.

"Great guardian." – Alamar said all smiling.

"What is?" – Ron asked looking around.

"Never mind." – Harry said. "We're all here as well with Hermione and Ron that was so persistent in coming making sure Gryffindor doesn't lose any house points."

"Oh, it'd be cool then if only Gryffindor loses points." – Alamar exclaimed amused.

"Oh, shut it." – Xsi cooled him down.

"So Cassie, what's the matter?" – Harry asked.

"Well, I have been observing few people these days that were so daring and annoying and I think it's time to put them in their places." – Cassie explained.

"How and who are they?" – Alamar asked.

"Who? Well, we can begin with Draco Malfoy. He's been really annoying. He was so proud today in putting Potter in his back pocket that... well you know."

"Was he now?" – Harry raised an eyebrow, a grin on his face.

"Yeah, he's been telling everyone what a great plan he had come up with to get you in trouble, dear brother."

"Brother?" – Hermione exclaimed surprised looking at Cassie as though she had lost her mind.

"Then there is our dear Professor Snape that was so cruel with the present here Hermione." – Cassie said, ignoring Hermione's reaction to the previous statement.

"Cassie, how do you plan to get it back to Snape? He's a teacher." – Xsi reflected.

"When there is a will, there is a way." – Cassie smiled.

"Okay, who else?" – Alamar asked.

"Then there is our beloved Mr. Filch." – Cassie replied.

"I've an idea about him but I'll require your help, sis." – Xsi said.

"What is it?" – Cassie asked.



"I'll tell you later. Then there is or should I say there are another two – they so happen to be your brothers – Ron, Gred and Forge." – Xsi continued.

"Wow!" – Ron exclaimed. "You're way out of your league here."

"I wouldn't be that sure, mate." – Harry inserted. "You have no idea what these two are capable of."

"As are my brothers; Mom's got more owls about them than the rest of the family. They are the troublemakers." – Ron countered.

"Wow then it should be interesting." – Harry exclaimed. "But I won't have any part in this. You two will handle them." – Harry said to his sisters.

"Deal, Nimbus." – Xsi said excited.

"Why do you call Harry Nimbus and your brother? I don't understand." – Hermione intervened finally.

"Because he is our brother." – Xsi replied.

Hermione looked strange at them then turned to Harry.

"Well, it is true. They are my sisters. Well, foster sisters but sisters nevertheless." – Harry explained while looking at Hermione and added. "Surprised?"

"Yes." – Hermione gave an honest answer. Cassie and Xsi could not understand but Harry knew that Hermione had read every book there is about him and there was no mention of Harry having sisters. "But why do you..."

"And Nimbus is his other name." – Cassie added.

"So you are Harry Nimbus James Potter." – Hermione tried to clear the mystery.

"No, he is Nimbus Dracon Solmyr." – Cassie corrected.

"What?" – Hermione asked confused.

"The reason why you have never heard of me having sisters, Hermione, is because the name under which I have been presenting myself for the past ten years has been Nimbus Solmyr, so no one would know that I live with Thant in Blackshire." – Harry explained. "This way I was protected from the servants of the Dark Lord."

"Blackshire?" – Hermione's eyes widened and started paling.

"Yes, we live there." – Xsi said all beaming.

"Hermione, what's the matter?" – Ron asked because he'd not heard the part where Harry lived.

"Harry lives in Blackshire, Ron." – Hermione answered still going paler.

"What – Blackshire?" – Ron repeated stuttering. "It can't be."

"What's the matter with you two?" – Alamar asked amused though he knew exactly why they were paling.

"Can we not discuss this now? Time is precious." – Cassie intervened at last.

"Cassie's right." – Alamar agreed. "So what's the plan?"

"Well, I thought it would be fair to repay Malfoy with the same coin." – Cassie said diplomatically though with an evil grin reminding Harry suddenly of Peeves.

"How?" – Harry asked.

"I thought that he could make the wrong impression in Potions' class. I got the idea because he's kind of Snape's favorite. What best an opportunity?"

"Yeah." – Xsi agreed. "Probably mixing the wrong ingredients all the time."

"How?"

"Well, Harry, you could use the Levitation spell and I'll sit next time close to him, let's say behind him. What do you think?"

"Brilliant, sis." – Harry exclaimed.

"What of Snape?" – Alamar asked.

"I thought you could help there, Alamar." – Xsi said.

"Tell me what to do!"

"Do you know the Polyjuice potion?"

"Yes, but this potion is made in a month."

"Well, not exactly."

"Oh, I get your thought." – Alamar said suddenly having an epiphany.

"You'll have it in two days."

"Excellent. Well, it seems we are ready." – Xsi said satisfied.

"What about Filch?" – Harry asked.

"I've got that covered." – Xsi said.

"Excellent, we are done." – Cassie said.

"Not just yet." – Harry said.

"What else is there?"

"You are all going to get into big trouble." – Hermione finally said snapping out.

"No, we are not. Trust me, Hermione." – Cassie said all smiling.

"Oh, and don't give us out, either. We like you a lot, Hermione but if you get us in trouble, you are going to regret it, I promise you that."  
– Xsi warned seriously with deviously flashing eyes.

"You have my word too." – Cassie added.

"If I were you, Hermione, without sounding like my two sisters, I would listen. They tend to do exactly as promised." – Harry confided.

"So Nimbus what was on your mind before Hermione's interference?"

"Well, we don't have a name." – Harry said suddenly remembering.

"How about the Marauders?" – Alamar suggested.

"No, it sounds lame." – Cassie rejected the idea at once.

"I agree. We need something..." – Xsi trailed off.

"Devious." – Harry added.

"Naughty." – Alamar interjected.

"Crazy." – Hermione couldn't resist adding. Everyone laughed. It seemed that she was interested into this trouble event as much as them.

"Oh, and also we can't be using our names obviously, so we'll have to use our nicknames." – Harry quickly added. "For those that have them of course. As for Ron and Hermione, we'll have to come up with something."

"Hmm, I agree on that part." – Cassie said.

"So what are your nicknames?" – Ron asked with interest.

"Well, Cassie's is Loki, Xsi's is Trivia, Alamar's is Pluto and well I'm Nimbus." – Harry answered. "As I was always in the clouds, I guess."

"That would be true." – Xsi smiled.

"Loki, ah, that explains a lot." – Hermione said thoughtfully.

"Yeah, doesn't it?" – Cassie smiled deviously.

"Well, what about those two?" – Alamar asked pointing at Ron and Hermione. "Trivia, would you do the honor?"

"Mhm." – Xsi nodded. "Well, Hermione is smart, loyal and rules obedient, so I think we could safely bestow upon her the name of..."

"Wow. Wouldn't you ask me for permission before choosing on my behalf?" – Hermione asked semi furiously, semi jokingly for being ignored.

"Well, okay. What name would you choose for yourself, Hermione?" – Xsi said.

"Maybe Hermie." – Ron suggested and everyone, including Hermione, laughed. "What?"

"Ron, it's too obvious. It has to be something that reflects who she is." – Alamar explained.

"Oh, sorry."

"Oh, I got it." – Cassie exclaimed finally making everyone looking at her. "She'll be Athena."

"Great." – Hermione nodded. "I accept."

"Why?" – Ron asked.

"Ron, Athena is an ancient Greek goddess of wisdom, witchcraft and intelligence." – Xsi explained patiently.

"Oh, it suits you nicely." – Ron said turning to Hermione.

"Thank you, Ronald." – Hermione said, slightly blushing.

"Now, Ron. Ron is loyal, a good friend and a Gryffindor with all the qualities that go with it." – Cassie began. "So, he would be...Tyr."

"Tyr? What's that? Another muggle GOD?" – Ron asked.

"Tyr, Ron, was a God of justice, glory and war in the Norse Mythology. All gods of the mythologies were magic capable so they are not really muggle." – Cassie explained patiently.

"God of glory, justice and war – hmm – I liked it." – Ron said thinking it over aloud.

"Then it is accepted. Now the naming, hmm, we could be the... "

"I got it." – Harry exclaimed.

"What?" – Alamar asked.

"We represent the four houses of Hogwarts so the House's Union." – Harry proposed.

"Hmm – Liminis Concordia – hmm – I don't know, Nimbus. It doesn't ring well." – Xsi said.

"We could be Holly Jollies." – Ron inserted.

"Intriguing but let's refine it – I got it –it's a bit insulting to the muggles but it does have a nice ring – Holly Spirits." – Cassie said.

"It is insulting – the Frolic Spirits." – Harry said finally.

"Hogwarts Caper Spirits." – Hermione suddenly inserted.

"I like it." – Alamar said.

"Then it is decided we'll be known as the Hogwarts Caper Spirits." – Cassie said sealing the name.

"Agreed." – The rest said.

"Now, back to bed before anyone catches us here, Capers." – Cassie said.

"Tomorrow, we'll meet outside to refine the details of the attack plan so everyone would know what to do – let the fun begin." – Xsi added.

The group separated and headed back to their respectful houses. All had a good time and the next week promised to be really crazy.

The next morning, Malfoy could not believe his eyes when he saw that Ron and Harry were still at school. They looked quite cheerful and it seemed that they were even mocking him.

Hermione joined Harry and Ron at breakfast at the Gryffindor table. It seemed however that during the night she had changed her mind about the crazily named new prankster group – the Hogwarts Caper Spirits (though she was the one that proposed the name).

"You know I had a second thought. Your sisters, Harry, are indeed quite crazy and I don't think we should do it." – She said.

"It's too late for that now, Hermione, besides you gave us the name. And Ron just had a brilliant idea as to what are signature would be – Four Houses – One Hogwarts." – Harry said.

"Ah, well...this is...indeed brilliant." – Hermione admitted.

"Don't worry, Hermione. We'll start with Draco. Xsi just sent a message saying that we will deal with Snape on Halloween." – Harry said.

"And we will need your brilliance, Hermione." – Ron added quickly.

Hermione was obviously flattered but she quickly came back to her senses.

"You can't buy me this way."

"Oh, so there is a way?" – Harry asked with a smile.

"No, there isn't." – Hermione fussed, looking outraged but remembered that she said it in such a way so she wasn't really that mad.

Then the owls came in and immediately everyone's attention was turned towards Hedwig and four other owls carrying a long, thin package. The owls soared down and dropped it in front of Harry. There was a note. Harry read and his heart leapt with joy. It was the new broomstick – Nimbus 2000 sent by Thant in response for Harry becoming the youngest Quidditch seeker in a century.

There was also another note from Professor McGonagall saying the same and only adding that not to open it in the Great Hall and that his first training was to be tonight at seven on the Quidditch field with Oliver Wood.

Harry handed the note to Ron.

"Unbelievable. I haven't even touched one." – He said with envy.

"Let's go outside." – Harry proposed.

They dashed outside but at the marble staircase their way was blocked by Crabbe, Goyle and Malfoy who seized at once the package from Harry's hand and felt it.

"You're done, Potter." – He sneered. "It's a broomstick and first years are not allowed to have one."

Ron on the other hand couldn't resist. "It's not just any broomstick, Malfoy. It's a Nimbus 2000. What did you say you had at home a Comet Two Sixty?" – Ron grinned at Harry and added. "Comets are flashy but no match for a Nimbus."

"How would you know, Weasley?" – Malfoy snapped. "You can't even afford the handle. I guess you and your brothers save twig by twig."

Ron turned red and was about to response when Professor Flitwick came around the corner. "You are not arguing, are you boys?"

"Potter's been sent a broomstick, Professor." – Malfoy said quickly.

"Ah, yes, that's right." – Flitwick said beaming at Harry. "Professor McGonagall informed me of the special circumstances. And what model is it?"

"It's a Nimbus 2000, sir." – Harry replied resisting the urge to laugh at the sight of Malfoy's horror. "And it's really thanks to Malfoy here that I got it."

Harry and Ron marched away fighting the urge to laugh at Malfoy's obvious rage and confusion. "Well, it's true. If he hadn't stolen the Remembrall from Neville, I wouldn't have the ..."

"You still think this is a reward for breaking the rules?" – Hermione asked angrily while stomping up the stairs. She was looking disapprovingly at the package.



"Well, not really." – Harry replied. "But it isn't my fault that McGonagall decided to make a seeker instead of punishing me, after all." – Harry added curtly.

"Well, maybe not but this is no reason why you should behave like this..." – Hermione continued to fume.

"And the prize is the look on Malfoy's face." – Ron said quickly.

They laughed with delight, even Hermione smiled.

"Not to mention that Nimbus has a Nimbus." – Ron added too, suppressing a smile.

"Very funny," – Harry remarked.

"It's quite right. Good one, Ron." – Hermione smiled at Ron.

At seven o'clock, Harry headed towards the Quidditch field. Oliver Wood was not there yet. Though Harry knew the rules of Quidditch he had never been to a Quidditch stadium. It was big – hundreds of seats set above the ground so the people could have a good view at the field and to see what's going on. There were the golden hoops at either side of the field.

Harry was too anxious to fly again so he mounted the broom and kicked off the ground. What a feeling it was. He swooped in and out the golden hoops and then sped up and down the field. The broom obeyed him at the slightest touch.

"Hey, Potter." – Oliver Wood had arrived with a wooden box that must contain the four balls of Quidditch, as Harry thought. And he was right.

"Now, come here." – Oliver asked while he opened the box. "You told me you know the rules and how the game is played, right?"

"Yeah, I do."

"Alright. So these two?" – Oliver pointed at the two identical, jet black balls.

"Those are the bludgers." – Harry replied instantly. "Their purpose is to knock players off their brooms that is why each team has two Beaters to divert them from the rest of the players and in turn try to knock off the opponent's players."

"Very good, Potter. Now, the red ball?"

"This is the Quaffle. The Chasers of each team pass it to each other trying to score through the goals." – Harry pointed at the golden hoops. "This is why each team has a keeper trying to prevent the chasers from scoring."

"Very good and now the last ball." – Oliver said bending down and taking out the last ball, which was as big as a large nut. "This is the Golden Snitch, as you know, and the most important ball. It's very hard to catch because it's so fast."

"And this is the seeker's job." – Harry added.

"Yes, your job." – Oliver confirmed. "When you catch it, the game ends and the team receives additional hundred and fifty points. But if the seeker has not caught the snitch the game could continue indefinitely. That's why the seekers are fouled a lot. So you got to wave in between the Chasers and the Quaffle, the beaters and bludgers. Any questions?"

Harry shook his head. He understood what he had to do but the question in his mind was would he be able to do it.

"Now, we won't practice with the snitch, yet." – Oliver said and put back the snitch in the box. "It's getting dark and might lose it. We'll practice with these instead."

Oliver pulled out a bag full of golf balls. And they practiced. Every time Wood threw a ball, Harry caught it, which excited Wood so much saying that this year the cup was surely going to be theirs.

Harry was now very busy with the Quidditch practices but this did not stand in the way of the master plan of H.C.S (Hogwarts Caper Spirits). They started teasing Malfoy on the very next Potion's lesson.

Malfoy managed to bathe Snape in his potion, which earned him two weeks detention and Slytherin lost for the first time in history twenty

points, as Snape was furious. At first, of course, Snape suspected that it wasn't Malfoy's fault but he quickly discovered that it was which led to the losing of points. Snape never had the reason to take points from his house but this little incident proved otherwise.

The reason for this deception was due to the brilliant tactical thinking of Cassie and Hermione that helped in the execution, which Harry performed with diligence. Actually, the credit goes to Cassie who's been the mastermind of this operation so the first phase of the master plan of the Capers was a total success.

After that class, Harry, Ron, Hermione and Cassie had to hide in an abandoned classroom to let go the burst of laughter which they could hold no longer. Cassie then decided that it would be best to leave Malfoy alone for two weeks before recommencing the teasing or otherwise Snape might get suspicious. They all agreed.

The next target was to be Snape. This time, it was Alamar and Xsi's turn. Alamar had acquired the Polyjuice potion, which Lady Synca had sent. She was informed of the little prank of course. And as she found it absolutely innocent she had sent them the potion. Hermione, on the other hand, was not entirely sure that the prank was to be innocent but Cassie and Xsi managed to reassure her.

"All preparations are done." – Xsi informed at the last meeting of the Capers the night before Halloween.

"Are you sure of this?" – Hermione asked still unsure.

"Absolutely." – Xsi confirmed with a devious smile.

"I mean if we get caught." – Hermione stressed.

"Hermione, nobody knows that we are behind it." – Xsi reassured.

"Well, besides it is going to carry the name of Trivia and Pluto, and the Capers. They would probably think that there are some really crazy ghosts in the school." – Cassie inserted.

"And they wouldn't be far from the truth." – Hermione remarked.

"Indeed." – Alamar laughed, as did everyone else.

"Come on, Hermione, its Halloween. Strange things can happen during that night." – Cassie said as though predicting tomorrow's weather.

"Okay, everyone take your positions and let the games begin." – Xsi said.

The next day, Harry, Ron and Hermione were having Charms in Flitwick's cabinet. The Professor was now sure that could try to levitate objects, which was long awaited since they saw Neville's toad zoom around the classroom. The Professor divided them into pairs and placed one feather before them. Ron and Hermione were paired together. Harry had to share his with Seamus.

"Now, students don't forget the nice wrist movement we've been practicing!" – Flitwick squeaked standing again on the pile of books on his desk. "Remember, swish and flick, and of course pronounce the magic words correctly – Wingardium Leviosa, for if you not you would be like the Wizard Baruffio who instead of 's' said 'f' and found himself on the floor with a buffalo on his chest."

It was very difficult as the students found out. Harry, on the other hand, having being taught Charms by a private tutor in Solmyr's castle and also having done it for few months now while transporting some ingredients from Cassie's cauldron to Malfoy's found it very easy. However, Hermione did it first, which Flitwick rewarded with ten points.

Seamus, however, was having great difficulties and being impatient he prodded it with his wand and set the feather on fire. Professor Flitwick saw them in the time to extinguish the fire and gave them another feather, which Harry levitated up to the ceiling and back, which granted Gryffindor another ten points.

Ron also had difficulty with the spell for he was waving his long arms like a windmill. Hermione, of course, snapped at one point and tried to explain it to him.

"You're not pronouncing it correctly. It's Wing-gar-dium Levi-o-sa, make the gar nice and long."

This effort did not have the effect she was hoping. Ron got frustrated.

"You do it then." – He snapped.

Hermione rolled up her sleeves and with one swift movement of her wand "Wingardium Leviosa", the feather rose off the desk and hovered several feet above their heads. Ron was now even more frustrated at her second success with the feather.

"Chin up, Ron." – Harry inserted. "You'll get it next time."

"Sure." – Ron replied curtly.

When they exited class Ron was in a very foul mood. And the problem came when he shared with Harry what bothered him.

"It's Hermione. No wonder no one can stand her. She's a nightmare. Honestly."

Someone knocked into Harry as they hurried past him. It's Hermione and Harry got a glimpse of her face – and was startled to find tears on it.

"I think she heard you."

"So?" – Ron shot defiantly but looking a bit uncomfortably. "She must have realized that with that attitude she'll never have friends."

"We're her friends, Ron. She's part of the Capers." – Harry said a bit more sharply than intended.

Ron looked defiantly at Harry. "So you're siding with her."

"No, I'm just saying that you shouldn't be so jealous of her." – Harry said but obviously came to the realization that he should not have said it, as Ron turned red and left him.

"Oh, Nimbus, what have you done this time?" – Xsi asked approaching from the dungeons.

"Oh, don't you get me started, Trivia. Those two have been fighting since day one."

"Why, what happened?"

And Harry told her about the Charms lesson. She listened carefully and then said.

"You know, little brother, you shouldn't have said anything. You've been untactful. Ron is your friend and you'd be supporting him."

"And Hermione?"

"Well, I don't say that she's right too but she is Hermione." – Xsi rolled her eyes, Harry smiled. "But you should tell Ron to remember that Hermione is coming from a muggle family therefore she feels she has to prove herself more often than the rest. While he comes from a wizard family therefore he has only to stand up for the name of his family. Catch my meaning?"

"Yeah, I think so. Thanks Trivia." – Harry replied then sighed deeply. "Well, I'll try to get Ron back."

"Good and I'll try to find Hermione." – Xsi said and strode away.

Unfortunately, Hermione didn't turn up for the next class and wasn't seen all afternoon. Harry had fortunately managed to mend his friendship with Ron, and now they were heading toward the Great Hall. But on their way for the Halloween feast, they overheard Parvati Patil telling that Hermione has locked herself up in the girl's bathroom crying and asked to be left alone. This made Ron feel very uncomfortable but entering into the Hall managed to put off Hermione out of their minds.

Thousands of live bats were swooping over the tables in low black clouds while thousands more fluttered from the walls and the ceiling. The feast appeared into the golden plates, just as they did on the start-of-term banquet.

Harry looked over the table in direction of the Hufflepuff table where he met the gaze of Alamar who winked. Xsi did the same from the Ravenclaw table. Their gaze turned to the teacher's table and especially in the direction of Snape while their lips were clearly saying 'Five, four, three, two, one...'

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 9

### Introducing Hogwarts Caper Spirits

Previously:

Harry looked over the table in direction of the Hufflepuff table where he met the gaze of Alamar who winked. Xsi did the same from the Ravenclaw table. Their gaze turned to the teacher's table and especially in the direction of Snape while their lips were clearly saying 'Five, four, three, two, one...'

On the teacher's table, Snape choked. He quickly stood up, wriggled like a worm and fell behind the table that continued to shake under Snape's occasional kicks. Only few seconds have passed since Snape started acting strangely. Professor Dumbledore, face turning white, immediately stood up and went to see Snape. The students, beside the Capers, had no idea what was going on. But before Dumbledore could reach Snape, he had stood up. The entire school fixed their gaze at Snape. All remained silent as to the sight of him then without warning the Great Hall exploded into laughter that even the Slytherins could not hold up.

The sight was very unusual and intoxicatingly comic. Professor Snape was no more instead there was a six feet two figure with long, dark blonde hair, bright blue eyes with long eyelashes, cute snub nose, and quite broadened breasts. The figure was still dressed in Snape's clothes, which made the appearance even more comic. Professor Dumbledore and the rest of the teachers had to suppress the smile on their faces so not to embarrass further the newly transformed Snape.

Professor Dumbledore examined carefully Snape's food and found small traces of aroma spices covering what was left of the Polyjuice potion. Then as he was to check the rest of the food, it exploded in fumes leaving the teachers completely dumbfounded. The fumes made of four distinct colors – green, scarlet red, blue and orange-yellow, rose above the table forming letters that read "HAPPY HALLOWEEN – signed the CAPER SPIRITS". The fumes then vanished.

Professor Dumbledore was still looking at the place in air where the sign was just a few seconds ago. His eyes flashed in the direction of



the Weasley's Twins but noticed that they look as dumbfounded as him and the rest of the teachers though they were still laughing hard time, Snape was still here – in his new outfit. Many of the students were down on the floor, tapping the ground with their fists and holding their stomachs with tears in their eyes trying to control the laughter.

Everyone thought that it was over but the truth was that there was more. A minute after the fumes disappeared, a brightly colored piñata appeared in mid air above the teacher's table held by four ropes colored in the same fashion as the fumes.

There was a grunt noise coming from Mr. Filtch as in his hands he was holding the piñata traditional stick. He would have probably thrown it away if there wasn't the sudden noise coming from inside the piñata. All could distinctly hear scratching as claws produce that noise when attacking a rough surface. But Argus Filtch had distinctly recognized the voice of Mrs. Norris. He lifted the stick and started hurtling it against the piñata with furious swings. Then he stopped as obviously somehow a blindfold had appeared before his eyes and though he tried to remove it, it seemed stuck so he had to continue the swinging blindfolded but he did because Mrs. Norris was making desperate attempts to leave her new accommodation.

All this was highly comic and students and teachers continued to laugh unstoppably. Everyone had tears in their eyes, some had even red eyes – so funny it was, and even Snape was seen with a grim smile on his face. Unfortunately this only enraged the poor Mr. Filtch and maddened completely Mrs. Norris though she was still trapped in the piñata. Finally he managed to break the piñata; the blindfold fell as Filtch's jaw. Out of the piñata dropped Mrs. Norris. The poor cat however was dressed like a buffoon. Argus Filtch quickly took the cat in his hands and vanished through a door behind the teacher's table accompanied by the laughter of the Great Hall.

It was in this very moment when the entrance doors of the Great Hall opened briskly and Professor Quirrell entered hastily panting as he went. He dropped near the teacher's table, gathered his breath and shouted.

"TROLL IN THE DUNGEONS! TROLL IN THE DUNGEONS!" – Then he added silently. "Thought you ought to know!" and then he sunk to the floor in a dead faint.

There was uproar. The students panicked and it took several exploding purple firecrackers from Professor Dumbledore's wand to restore silence.

"Now, prefects will lead their houses back to the dormitories while the teachers and I will go to the dungeons." – Professor Dumbledore said calmly as though nothing had really happened.

Professor Snape looked sternly at Quirrell then vanished through the door behind the teacher's table.

"First years, follow me!" – Percy was in his element. "Everyone, follow me! Stick together. No need to fear the troll if you follow my orders. Make way, first years, coming through! Excuse me, I'm a prefect!"

"How could a troll get in?" – Harry asked while climbing the stairs.

"I don't really know." – Ron replied. "They are supposed to be very stupid. Maybe Peeves let it in for a Halloween joke of his own."

They passed by various groups of people hurrying in different directions. As they made their way through a crowd of confused Hufflepuffs, Harry suddenly had a jolt. He seized Ron's arm.

"What?"

"Hermione."

"What about her?" – Ron asked confused.

"She's still in the toilet." – Harry replied stressed.

"And she doesn't know about the troll." – Alamar suddenly added coming through the crowd of Hufflepuffs.

"So?" – Ron asked but was biting his lip.

"So we have to look for her." – Harry replied.

"Alright, but Percy must not see us." – Ron said finally.

"No worry." – Alamar inserted. "Join in with my house."

Ducking down, Ron and Harry meshed up with the Hufflepuffs that were going the other way. Then all three slipped down a deserted side corridor and made haste towards the girls' bathroom. They had just turned around the corner when they heard hurried footsteps.

"Percy!" – Ron hissed and pulled Harry behind a large stone statue while Alamar hid behind a coat of armor.

But it was not Percy; it was the still transformed Snape. He crossed the corridor and vanished out of view. They looked at each other wondering why Snape wasn't with the rest of the teachers. They decided to follow him. Alamar went ahead. Few seconds later he returned.

"He's heading to the third floor."

"What?" – Ron's jaw fell.

"Why?" – Harry asked.

"We'll find out later – now Hermione." – Alamar stressed.

"Oh, yeah." – Ron said but then stopped as they returned back to the bathroom corridor. "What's that strange smell?"

The smell Ron was referring to was filling now the air. It reminded of a toilet that has not cleaning for at least a century and some other stinking ingredients.

But the smell was the least of their problem. They heard a grunt noise along with shuffling footfalls of gigantic feet. Alamar took them to a passage on the left where they in time saw something huge lurking in the shadow of the moonlight.

It was the troll. It was at least twelve feet high with boulder like body, granite gray skin, a small but bald head, with short thick legs and long, monkey like arms holding a huge wooden club that was scratching the floor.

The troll stopped before a doorway and peered in. It waggled its long ears, scratched its bald head with a finger making up his mind and slouched in.

"The keys are in the lock." – Harry muttered. "We've got it."

"Good idea." – Ron said nervously.

"But..." – Alamar was saying but too late.

Harry and Ron run quickly and locked the door. Alamar had gone white.

"Harry, NO!" – He managed to regain his vocals.

"Why?"

A heart stopping, terrifying scream tore the silence of the corridor. It was coming from the door they just locked.

"It's Hermione inside there." – Alamar finally swallowing the words.

"Oh, hell!" – Harry gasped.

It was really the last thing they wanted to do but what choice did they have? They opened quickly the door and ran inside.

The sight wasn't pretty. Hermione was shrinking against the wall opposite, looking as though she would faint any minute now. The troll was advancing on her knocking the sinks off with his club.

"We have to do something." – Alamar said.

"Confuse it!" – Harry desperately turned to Ron, and started throwing tabs at the troll.

The troll stopped just a few feet from Hermione. It blinked stupidly around trying to find out the source of the noise. His tiny, mean, beady eyes then got a fix on Harry. After nicks of reflection, the troll moved in Harry's direction.

"Oy, pea-brain." – Ron shouted while throwing metal pipes at him.

The troll changed direction going straight at Ron. Then Alamar joined by throwing pieces of wood at the troll and screaming as much as he could master while Harry made a run behind the troll and reached for Hermione.

"Come on! Run!" – But Hermione did not move. She was still flat against the wall, her mouth opened with terror.

The troll was about to reach Alamar so Harry did the unthinkable. It was both very brave and extremely dangerous. He jumped on the back of the troll and fastened his hands around the troll's neck. The troll, of course, could not sense Harry but anyone can when a wooden stick is stuck upright in your nose. Harry had his wand with him and the moment he landed on the troll's back, his hand flinched and his wand ended up in one of the troll's nostrils.

The troll howled in pain trying to sneeze out the wand but the continued screams were driving him berserk. The troll twisted and flailed with its club, with Harry still hanging on his neck. The troll got Harry by the feet and hung him upside down. Then tried to hit him with his club but Harry evaded though the situation did not look good.

"Ron, do something." – Alamar shouted.

Hermione had further sunk on the floor in fright when Ron pulled off his wand and cast the first spell that came in mind.

"Wingardium Leviosa!"

The club suddenly darted of the troll's hand straight up, turned slowly over and then with a dull crack fell back on its owner's head. The troll swayed on the spot, turned around falling flat on the floor with a thud that made the floor tremble. Harry was thrown over. He quickly stood still shaking and catching his breath. Ron, on other hand, was still with raised wand and mouth opened watching what he had done.

"Is it...it...dead?" – Hermione spoke first.

"Great jobbb, Ron." – Alamar stuttered from his corner.

"No, I think it's only knocked out." – Harry replied to Hermione while bending down to collect his wand from the troll's nostril. But it was covered in lumpy grey glue. "Urgh – troll boogies." He then wiped them off the troll's trousers.

Then there was a sudden slamming and quick footsteps that made all four of them look up. They hadn't realized what a clatter they had been caused, and logically, someone downstairs must have heard it. A moment later, Professor McGonagall had come bursting in, closely followed by the still handsome Snape and Quirrell on the rear that took one look at the troll, let out a faint whimper, and sank onto the floor clutching his heart.

Professor Snape bent down to check on the troll while Professor McGonagall looked absolutely furious. Harry had never seen her so angry – her lips were white. Any hope of glorious points to Gryffindor faded from Harry's mind.

"What on Earth were you thinking of?" – Cold fury filled her voice. She looked at Harry, then at Alamar and lastly at Ron still with his wand in the air. They looked at each other. "You are all very lucky to be alive. Why aren't you in your dormitories?"

They all looked down while Snape's gaze was piercing them. Harry suddenly noticed that Snape's right leg was bleeding. The Professor noticing his gaze quickly covered his leg with his cloak. Then a small voice from the shadows came out.

"Please, Professor McGonagall – they were looking for me."

"Miss Granger!" – Professor McGonagall looked shocked at her, and as though she had just noticed her presence here.

Hermione got back on her feet. "I went looking for the...the troll. I've read so much about them that I thought I could deal with it on my own."

Alamar and Harry's jaws fell while Ron dropped his wand not believing what he has just heard – Hermione telling a down straight lie at a teacher.

Hermione continued. "If they hadn't found me, I would be dead by now. Alamar distracted the troll while Harry stuck his wand in the

troll's nose and Ron knocked it out with its own club. It was about to finish me off when they arrived so they had no time to call for help."

Harry, Alamar and Ron looked as though this story was not new to them.

"Well, in that case." – Professor McGonagall said while looking at the four of them. "Miss Granger, you foolish girl, how on Earth could you think you could tackle a fully grown mountain troll on your own?"

Hermione hung her head. Harry was speechless. Hermione who was the last person to break the rules though she had been approving with the little tricks of the newly founded Capers and taking small part in them too but there she was pretending now so she could get her fellow Capers off the hook.

"Miss Granger, for your serious lack of judgment, Gryffindor loses five points. And I have to say that I'm very disappointed in you. If you're not hurt you can return to Gryffindor Tower where students are finishing up the feast." – Professor McGonagall said.

Hermione nodded and exited the bathroom. Professor McGonagall turned to Harry, Alamar and Ron.

"I hope you three realize how lucky you were, not many first years students could take on a fully grown mountain troll and live to tell the tale. Therefore, you will all receive five points each for sheer damn luck. Professor Dumbledore shall be informed of this, of course. Now, you may go!"

They hurried out of the bathroom but spoke when they felt comfortably far enough from the bathroom.

"We should have gained more than ten points." – Ron said.

"Five you mean, after deducting Hermione's." – Harry corrected.

"I'm this way." – Alamar swayed left as they reached the staircase.

"Okay, and thanks for the help." – Harry said.

"Don't mention it." – Alamar smiled faintly. "Good night, Nimbus, Tyr."

"Good night, Pluto." – Harry and Ron wished as they continued their way to the Gryffindor tower.

"It was good of her to get us out of trouble." – Ron admitted.

"Yeah, but she wouldn't have to if we hadn't locked that thing with her." – Harry reminded.

They had reached the portrait of the Fat Lady. "Pig Snout!"

The common room was packed and very noisy given that the Twins were the loudest. Everyone was enjoying the food that has been sent up while discussing Snape's transformation, and Mrs. Norris. Hermione, however, stood by the door, waiting for them.

There was a short awkward moment. But then they looked at each other and said "Thanks!" while hurrying off then to get plates.

But from this moment on, Hermione became really their friend, and a true friend. She became more tolerant now to breaking rules and accepting the crazy ideas of the Capers. There are some things you can't share without ending up liking each other better, and knocking out a twelve foot troll is one of them.

The next day, after classes, Harry, Ron and Hermione went out to the grounds to a predetermined location where they met with Alamar, Cassie and Xsi. The last two had heard about the troll but wanted to know every detail of it. Hearing the real and true facts is sometimes stranger than reality.

"Wow, it must have been really scary." – Cassie gasped as Alamar finished the story while Harry, Ron and Hermione had no strength to tell it over.

"I'm deeply impressed." – Xsi said looking at Ron who turned red at once.

"Now would someone tell me what happened at the feast?" – Hermione asked. "Yesterday, Harry and Ron kind of forgot but it was understandable."



"Of course, Athena." – Xsi exclaimed happily and told her everything bit by bit. Hermione was listening but with each word her astonishment was growing.

"Really?" – Hermione exclaimed at last. "You transformed Snape into..."

"Yeah." – And everybody laughed as they remembered yesterday's sight of Snape.

"Also we managed to take a picture of him, and for the years to come it will be a soothing to remember." – Cassie added.

"But how did you do the exploding fumes?" – Hermione asked curious. "This is advanced magic."

"Well, I wanted to know the same." – Harry added.

"Well, we asked our two, naughtily, crazy friends to help." – Cassie replied cautiously.

"Who?" – Alamar, Ron and Hermione asked bewildered.

Harry pondered for a moment and then it hit him – their house elves – the two responsible for his sisters becoming troublemakers.

"You don't mean those two..." – Harry's voice trembled as it trailed off.

Cassie and Xsi nodded gently.

"Those two what?" – Ron repeated while Harry strode away.

"Never mind, Nimbus. He's not really thrilled to hear who helped us." – Cassie inserted.

"Who is it?" – Alamar repeated the question again hoping this time for a straight answer.

"Well, Kaiser and Casper, they are our house elves, and they are quite crazy even for house elves." – Xsi replied. "They also provided the piñata."

"And why is Harry not happy with them?" – Ron asked.

"Well, it's because he believes that they nudged us in the direction of troublemaking."

"Oh, I see. This certainly explains a lot." – Alamar ascertained while a smile appeared on his face.

"And did they?" – Hermione asked raising an eyebrow.

"Well, only a little." – Cassie replied looking as innocent as possible.

But Hermione understood better. Those house elves have indeed done what Harry suspected.

"Well, we have one more matter to discuss." – Alamar announced.  
"Athena, would you go to fetch Nimbus?"

"Sure." – Hermione replied not minding the use of her new nickname. She caught up with Harry and brought him back.

"So what's the matter, Pluto?" – Xsi asked.

"Well, before we came to rescue Athena and while all teachers were going to the dungeons, we saw Snape going straight to the third floor." – Alamar said. "So we were wondering what it is up there?"

"Hmm, who knows?" – Xsi stated.

"Wait a minute!" – Harry exclaimed suddenly remembering something.

"What?" – Ron exclaimed.

"Snape was covered in blood when he came down the bathroom." – Harry answered.

"No, he wasn't." – Ron countered.

"Not entirely. His right leg was in blood but he hid it when he noticed me looking." – Harry explained.

"So?" – Hermione asked trying to understand where he was going.

"So he must have got hurt while doing whatever he was doing up there on the third floor." – Harry said.

"So we should find out what it is." – Alamar concluded.

"No, the third floor corridor is strictly out of bounds for everyone." – Hermione said firmly. "We would do no such thing."

"But Athena, if a teacher was hurt then it must be something dangerous therefore I think that the students have the right to know. I mean if someone gets astray and suddenly falls there he would be in terrible danger." – Alamar said.

"Hmm, I happen to agree with them, Athena." – Xsi inserted.

"Not only that." – Cassie joined in. "It is very strange that while the other teachers run down the dungeons, Snape goes upstairs."

"Maybe, he wanted to check whatever was there is still there." – Hermione suggested.

"So there is something there that is protected!" – Alamar reasoned.

"Come on, Athena. We'll just have a quick look. Besides it is the place where we meet from time to time and we need to know if it is safe for us at least." – Xsi insisted.

"Oh." – Hermione bit her lip. "Oh, very well, but just a quick look and then no more looking."

"Deal!" – The others agreed.

"I propose we do it tonight." – Harry said.

"Why?" – Hermione started paling.

"Well, the sooner we know the better besides the first Quidditch match approaches and I will be training like crazy." – Harry replied.

"Uff, alright – tonight then." – Hermione sighed in defeat.

"Okay then, we'll meet on the third floor by the staircase at midnight." – Cassie said.

"Great." – Alamar said. "Now, if you would excuse me I have to send Mom a letter."

Alamar went away. Harry and Ron headed toward the Quidditch field while Hermione went straight to the library. Cassie and Xsi have gone the other way still studying Hogwarts grounds.

At quarter to eleven, Hermione, Ron and Harry slipped past the Fat Lady and made their way to the third floor. By the staircase, they found Alamar. Cassie and Xsi joined shortly after. Then they all continued to advance cautiously on the right hand side corridor. As they marched, a fire appeared on the top of the stone columns as though it was sensing their presence. And at the end of the corridor they saw a door.

Ron and Alamar tried to open it but it was obviously locked. The girls decided that this is it when they heard footsteps approaching. Panic took them.

"Oh, move over." – Hermione grunted. She quickly took her wand out and whispered. "Alohomora!"

The door swung open and they hurried inside. The footsteps stopped. And then they were saved by the most unlikely creature. They distinctly heard the enchanting voice of Peeves and a voice that made them realize how lucky they were, not being outside.

"Peeves have you seen anyone coming this way?" – Mr. Filch's voice asked quite impatiently.

Peeves, of course, adored when one is in a hurry simply because he never had helped anyone but himself and decided to play.

"Say please and I'll tell you something." – Peeves screeched in his singsong voice.

"Have you seen anyone?" – Filch insisted getting angry.

"Say please and I'll tell you something." – Peeves continued to enchant.

"Oh, okay, please!" – Filch grunted.

"SOMETHING! HA HA HA!" – Peeves shouted laughing crazily.  
"Say please and I shall tell you SOMETHING! And I did."

Mr. Filch had obviously left cursing Peeves as went. Indeed, the poltergeist was a cruel creature.

The youngsters visibly relaxed but not for long as Alamar had turned around. His face went white at once. He reached for Harry's arm and started pulling it.

"I think he's gone, now." – Harry said. "Alamar, what?"

"Turn around." – Alamar whispered with fear in his voice.

Harry turned and his jaw fell.

"What's going on with you two?" – Cassie asked while turning around.

Then she also noticed the reason. She reached for Xsi and Hermione. Ron also had turned around. They were all facing a horrible sight that filled the room behind them and understood why this corridor was deemed forbidden.

They were all looking at a monstrous dog that was filling the space between the floor and the ceiling. Its three heads and so pairs of mad rolling eyes were fixed at them; their mouths open with slippery ropes of saliva hanging from the yellowish spear like fangs.

The heads were still fixing them and the only reason why they were still alive, as Harry thought, was their sudden appearance. But the dog was getting over it as it was explained by the growing thunderous growl. Between death and possibly facing Filch, the group of youngsters clearly chose Filch. Harry quickly turned the knob of the door and the group jolted out closing the door quickly.

They sprinted until reaching the end of the corridor on the other side near the staircase. Filch was nowhere in sight but this did not matter.

"Oh, it was a close one." – Alamar said gasping for air.

"Yeah." – Harry agreed.

"Though it was definitely guarding something." – Xsi exclaimed.

"Indeed." – Hermione nodded in agreement.

"How do you know this?" – Alamar asked.

"It was standing on a trapdoor." – Cassie answered instead.

"But the question is...what is it guarding?" – Xsi pondered.

"Well, something – undoggy like." – Hermione answered, which made the rest of the group laugh.

"Yes but definitely something worth otherwise I can't imagine why Snape would seek it." – Alamar reasoned.

"And obviously he couldn't reach it." – Xsi added. Everyone looked at her. "Blimey, Nimbus, you said that yesterday you saw Snape's right bleeding leg. Obviously he tried to pass by the Cerberus but got bitten."

"Which would only prove that he doesn't know how to pass it." – Hermione reasoned.

"But what were they thinking in holding something like that in school?" – Ron shot in horror.

"It's called a Cerberus, Tyr." – Xsi explained.

"The three headed dog?"

"It's not a dog per say though it does look one – it's a Cerberus."

"And what is it?"

"Well, it is a rarely found creature these days." – Cassie inserted. "It is not very intelligent but looking at its size that's not a minus. It's used primarily for guardianship and sometimes for offensive purposes while dealing with giants or tarantulas."

"Yeah, the Cerberus hates those quite a bit." – Xsi added.

"But it is still an enigma what the Cerberus is protecting." – Cassie said.

"Yes, but we'll find out what it is." – Xsi said.

"I think we shouldn't get involved." – Hermione said.

"But Hermione, we already are involved besides Snape had tried already." – Cassie objected. "Trivia's right, we have to find out what it is."

"I just don't think that is a good idea." – Hermione said. "I mean it's placed here to be protected and especially for the students not to know. Otherwise, Professor Dumbledore would have said what it was."

"Maybe but maybe not. Professor Dumbledore is wise but not infallible. He can't possibly know everyone's intentions." – Xsi countered.

"Like ours." – Hermione couldn't resist retorting.

"But we don't know what it is but I'll bet you that Snape does." – Cassie intervened.

"I doubt that whatever it is is protected only by this dog." – Hermione said.

"Probably not but this is more reason for us to find out." – Cassie insisted.

"Why not admit the truth, Loki, you are just too curious!" – Harry said.

"Well, yes, I am but this is beside the point. Why would they put it here? And tell us about it. Well, okay, they warned us but why? Are all the hiding places in this huge castle gone missing?"

"Well." – Hermione thought for a while. "It is a bit strange indeed."

"You see." – Cassie exclaimed.

"Alright, but I think it's enough for tonight." – Hermione said. "We'll continue another day to solve the mystery."

"I agree." – Ron nodded.

"Well, see you all tomorrow." – Alamar said.

"Oh, and Gryffindors..." – Cassie said. "Don't attack the buns with the white chocolate cream that would be next to you tomorrow."

"Why?" – Hermione asked raising an eyebrow.

"You'll see." – Xsi replied mysteriously.

"On second thought, I don't want to know." – Hermione said.

"Actually, it would be best to keep anyone touching those." – Harry advised.

"I agree." – Hermione nodded in agreement.

"Well, see you tomorrow." – Cassie wished.

The next morning on breakfast, Hermione, Ron and Harry sat and cautiously looked for the white chocolate buns but there were none. They frowned but started eating nonetheless.

Soon the Twins joined them. They were talking to their friend Lee Jordan about something when Harry noticed that the buns had appeared right in front of George. He turned Hermione and Ron's attention to them.

"Oh, no!" – Hermione exclaimed but it was too late.

Fred and George had already taken a bite at the buns. At first nothing seemed to happen as they continued to eat and talk but then just a few minutes later...the effect of the buns took shape. The Weasley's Twins turned suddenly red and their faces were covered with nasty looking red boils.

As this took effect everyone on the Gryffindor table had become still. No one dared to touch the food anymore. The Twins were still



obviously stunned. Then some of the buns turned into green and blue fumes forming the greeting:

"HAPPY AFTER HALLOWEEN!

But it was not over – the fumes then reshaped in other letters reading:

HOGWARTS CAPER SPIRITS,

then it continued as though some invisible writer was there –  
WHOEVER DECLARES WAR ON ONE OF US DECLARES WAR  
ON ALL OF US!

SO BE READY GRED & FORGE – YOU DECLARED WAR ON  
THE CAPERS AND WE COME FOR YOU NOW – YOURS TRULLY  
– MISTRESSES LOKI & TRIVIA!

Fred and George looked at each other dumbfounded but they did get the message – someone had just declared war on them. Devious smiles appeared on their faces though still covered in red boils. Harry noticed they were twitching and aching, which probably meant that the red boils were not appearing only on their faces.

"You'd better go to the infirmary." – Lee Jordan turned to the Twins.  
"You look horrible!"

"Indeed." – Hermione confirmed, suppressing the smile on her face but Harry, Ron and the rest of the Gryffindor table could not so they all burst into laughter.

Someone had managed to offend the known troublemakers of Gryffindor and of the school. And it was unbelievably funny, even Fred and George had joined the laugh. But then they stood up as much as they could make their way to the infirmary.

"This promises to be very interesting." – Ron inserted, taking a vanilla crescent.

"Yeah!" – Harry agreed while taking in a ham sandwich.

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 10

### Clues

November arrived quickly. The mountains turned from dark green to icy gray while the lake chilled. The ground around the castle was covered in frost and Hagrid was even seen defrosting the broomsticks on the Quidditch field as the first match for the season Gryffindor versus Slytherin was coming.

The match was on Saturday and Harry was preparing for his first official play. Oliver Wood, as expected by his team mates, had become increasingly insane, as his team was training every available minute of the day. Harry was very thankful to his friends Ron and Hermione for without them he wouldn't have been able to finish all his homework.

The day before the match Hermione, Ron and Harry were outside in the courtyard during break. Hopefully, though it was quite freezing, Hermione had conjured bright blue portable flames. They were standing with their backs to it so to keep warm. As they were sitting they saw Professor Snape emerging from the main gate limping rapidly. Few minutes later, Professor Quirrell came in from the same place, looking paler than usual. He, of course, noticed Snape who was few feet before him and swiftly changed direction muttering something under breath.

"That's curious." – Hermione exclaimed.

"What?" – Ron asked lifting his head from the course book.

"Did you not notice?" – Hermione said raising an eyebrow.  
"Professor Quirrell and Snape are obviously on bad terms."

"Hermione, everyone knows that." – Ron observed with a bored voice.

"I know but this looked different." – Hermione continued thoughtfully.  
"They came from the same direction, probably somewhere outside the school grounds. And then Quirrell veered off in the opposite direction looking quite shaken and stressed out."

"Why has this to be strange, Hermione?" – Harry said. "They usually do that. After all, Snape's after his job."

"No, this time, it looked different." – Hermione insisted.

"Alright for the purpose of arguing," – Harry said. "What do you think could be the reason?"

"I don't know." – Hermione answered honestly. "But I think it is strange."

"Well, I think it's normal." – Harry shrugged.

"We'd better go in." – Ron inserted.

After classes, they headed back to Gryffindor Tower. They sat near the window where Hermione was checking their homework. She would never let them copy hers ("How would you ever learn?") but by asking her to read it, she always corrected it. Ron and Harry were grateful, especially Harry. He had to do Wood's last minute Quidditch practice that was harder and crazier but Wood was a Quidditch maniac and the captain.

Hermione had lent Harry a book to read – Quidditch throughout the Ages from which Harry learnt that there are seven hundred ways of committing foul and that all of them happened during a World Cup match in 1473. He also learnt that Seekers are usually the smallest and fastest players, and most serious accidents seem to happen to them.

As Harry was reading the Quidditch book, he noticed someone going to the forest. He left the book aside and stuck his face to the window. It was Professor Quirrell with the all known turban on his head. Quirrell soon vanished into the depths of the forest before Harry could tell the others though he did not find it necessary.

Later in the evening, Hermione, Ron, Harry and the Twins were the only one left in the common room. The Twins were unusually quiet. They were working on something as their heads were close together. Ron was just relaxing on the sofa and enjoying the gentle warmth of the fire. Hermione was making last checks on all her homework.

Harry was still beside the window nose in the Quidditch book, which was so interesting, and at places difficult to believe. He had finished writing all his homework then he had had a conversation with Wood about the match tomorrow, and then decided to plunge into the book to take his mind off the match. It was in that moment when he noticed movement at the edge of the forest. He left the book aside again.

"Hey!" – Harry called Ron and Hermione. "Come here!"

They came at once.

"What?" – Ron asked.

"There!" – Harry pointed.

At the place Harry was pointing they saw a hooded figure, which exited the forest shade in a strange manner. It was moving backwards. It was so strange. The figure moved up till it reached the shadow of the castle wall. Harry, Ron and Hermione opened the window and bent over to see well. A few moments later, from the same spot Professor Quirrell appeared. There was no sign of the hooded figure. On the light of the entrance they saw his face, it was pale with some silver spots around the mouth. Quirrell then vanished through the entrance.

Hermione closed the window. The three stood silent for quite a time before speaking.

"That was odd." – Ron said finally.

"Very odd, and what were those silver spots on his face?" – Hermione pondered.

"Was he the hooded figure?"

"Possibly." – Harry shrugged.

"We don't know that." – Hermione objected but did admit. "Though it was very strange."

"But why was he moving backwards?" – Ron continued to ask.

"Ron, we don't know whether it was Quirrell or not. There could have been two separate people. But this does not explain the silver spots. I've never seen something like that." – Hermione said.

"Could it be blood?" – Harry pondered.

"Well, we'll figure it out later." – Hermione said. "I'm off. See you tomorrow!"

Hermione packed her books and headed to bed. Ron and Harry remained a little while longer before going to bed. Harry was still thinking about what they saw. It was definitely Quirrell but why, this he did not know. He had no idea why he did not mention to Ron and Hermione that he had seen Quirrell enter into the forest earlier that evening. What was Quirrell doing in the forest that late? But the more he was trying to find an answer the less he was arriving at a plausible solution. After a time, he let it go because it was starting to give him a headache. He closed his eyes and fell quickly asleep.

The next morning dawned very bright but cold. The Great Hall was full of delicious smell and everyone's looking for a good a match.

Harry was comparatively calm given the good night sleep though the strange event of last night. Xsi had come over to the Gryffindor table to wish him luck. Cassie though she wanted to do the same did not as she was from the opposite team, and while Alamar was wishing Harry good luck, she only winked at him. Harry winked back.

Hermione was trying to get Harry to eat and though he was feeling calm he did not eat anything. The rest of the house was much exited. Seamus, Neville and Dean had prepared a little surprise. They had painted a large banner on one of the sheets that Scabbers had ruined. It said Potter for President, and Dean who was good at drawing, had done a large Gryffindor lion underneath. Hermione liked it at once and performed a complex spell so now the lion was changing colors.

By eleven o'clock the students took their place on the stands around the Quidditch pitch. Many of the students had binoculars. Though the seats were quite high, it was still difficult sometimes to see what's going on. Ron, Hermione, Neville, Dean and Seamus sat in the top row.

Meanwhile in the locker room, Harry and the rest of the team were changing into their scarlet red Quidditch robes (while Slytherin would be playing in green).

Wood cleared his throat for silence.

"Okay, men." – He said.

"And women." – Chaser Alicia Spinnet said.

And women." – Wood agreed. "This is it."

"The big one." – Fred Weasley said.

"The one we've been waiting for." – George Weasley added.

"We know Oliver's speech by heart." – Fred told Harry. "We were on the team last year."

"Shut it you two." – Wood barked. "This is the best team Gryffindor's had in years. We're going to win. I know it."

Then he glared at them as if to say, "Or else."

"Right, it's time. Good luck to all of you."

Harry followed Fred and George out of the locker room, and walked onto the Quidditch field to loud cheers.

Madam Hooch was refereeing. She waited for the two teams, broomstick in her hand, in the middle of the field.

"Now, I want a nice clean game." – She said, once they were all gathered around her. Harry did notice that she was particularly speaking to the Slytherin's captain, Marcus Flint, who looked as though he had troll blood in him. "Mount your brooms!"

Harry clambered on his broom, Nimbus 2000, when Madam Hooch gave a loud blast on her silver whistle. Fifteen brooms rose up, they were off.

"And the Quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina Johnson of Gryffindor – what an excellent chaser, and rather attractive – "

"JORDAN!"

"Sorry, Professor!"

The Twins' friend, Lee Jordan, was doing the commentary for the match, closely watched by Professor McGonagall. "And she's really belting along up there, a neat pass to Alicia Spinnet, a good find of Wood's, last year only a reserve – back to the Johnson, and no Slytherin's got the Quaffle, Marcus Flint, Slytherin's captain heading straight for the goals, he's going to sc... no Wood demonstrates excellent defense, chaser Katie Bell of Gryffindor takes the Quaffle, nice dive around Flint, and - OUCH – that must have hurt, hit in the back of the head by a bludger – Quaffle retaken by Slytherin, Adrian Pucey speeding off towards Gryffindor's goals, but he's blocked by a second bludger sent by George or Fred Weasley can't tell which, anyway Johnson is with the Quaffle again and off she goes, dodges a speeding bludger, the goal posts are ahead – come on, now, Angelina – Keeper Blutchey dives – and she scores – Gryffindor scores."

Gryffindor cheers filled the cold air, with howls coming from the Slytherins.

"Budge up there, move along."

"Hagrid." – Ron exclaimed while squeezing with Hermione to make place for Hagrid.

"Bin watchin' from me hut." – Hagrid said patting large size binoculars, "But it' isn't the same as bein' in the crowd. No sign of the snitch yet, eh?"

"Nope." – Ron replied. "Harry hasn't had much to do."

Way up above them, Harry was gliding over the game looking for the snitch, which was part Wood's game plan.

"Keep out of the way until you catch sight of the snitch, "– Wood had said. "We don't want you attacked before you have to be."

When Angelina scored, Harry made a couple of loop-the-loops to express his feelings. Now he was back to looking for any trace of the



snitch. A bludger came pelting his way, but Harry dodged while Fred Weasley came after it.

"All right there, Harry?" – He yelled while sending furiously the bludger at Marcus Flint.

"Slytherin in possession," – Lee Jordan commented. "Adrian Pucey with the Quaffle, ducks the two bludgers, and – Wait a minute – wasn't that the snitch?"

Adrian Pucey dropped the Quaffle as the snitch passed his left ear.

Harry saw it. In a great rush of excitement he dived downward after the golden ball. Slytherin Seeker, Terrence Higgs, saw it too. Neck-to-neck they hurtled toward the snitch – the Chasers of both teams seemed to have forgotten what they were supposed to be doing and were watching in mid air.

Harry was faster – he was seeing the round ball with its fluttering little wings darting ahead – he put some extra speed – and – WHAM! A roar of rage echoed from the Gryffindors below – Marcus Flint had blocked Harry on purpose – and the snitch was gone.

"Foul!" – The Gryffindors screamed.

Madam Hooch spoke angrily to Flint, and then ordered a free shot at goal posts, which Katie Bell executed with precision.

It was as Harry dodged a speeding bludger that darted pass him when it happened. His broom suddenly lurched, and for a split of a second, Harry thought he would fall off. He managed to get a grip of his broom though he never felt this way.

Then it happened again. His broom shook as though trying to throw him off. Of course, Nimbus 2000s don't suddenly decide to get rid of their riders. Harry tried to turn in direction of Gryffindor goal posts, and ask Wood for time out, but realized the impossibility of his wish. He had no longer control over the broom, which was now zigzagging with violent swishing movements that almost unseated him.

"Dunno know what Harry's doin'." – Hagrid mumbled. "If I didn't know better I'd say he'd lost control of the broom...but he can't have..."

Suddenly people were pointing at Harry. His broom was rolling over, and over, with him only managing to hold on. Then the whole crowd gasped. The broom gave a wild jerk, and Harry swung off it. He was now dangling from it, holding on one hand.

"Did something happen when Flint blocked him?" – Seamus asked.

"Can't happen." – Hagrid objected, voice shaking. "Can't anything interfere with a broomstick except powerful Dark Magic – no kid could do that to a Nimbus 2000..."

At these words, Hermione seized Hagrid's binoculars and started frantically looking at the crowd.

"What are you doing?" – Ron asked, white-faced.

"I knew it." – Hermione gasped. "Snape – look!"

Ron grabbed the binoculars and looked. Snape was in the middle of the stands opposite them. He had fixed his eyes on Harry and was muttering nonstop under his breath.

"He's doing something to Harry's broom." – Hermione said. "Jinxing it."

"What can we do?"

"Leave it to me."

Before Ron could say even one more word, Hermione darted off. Ron turned the binoculars back to Harry, whose broomstick was vibrating so much, it was not possible he could hang on for much longer.

"Hurry Hermione!" – Ron mumbled.

Hermione had fought her way through the crowd to the stand where Snape was, and was now racing along the row behind him, she didn't even stop to say sorry when she knocked Professor Quirrell headfirst into the row front. Reaching Snape, she knelt, pulled out her wand and conjured the blue fire on Snape's robes.

It took Snape, perhaps, thirty seconds to realize that his robes were on fire. A sudden yelp told her she had done her job. She scooped the fire into a small jar she had with her, Snape would never know what happened.

It was enough. Up in the air, Harry climbed back on his broom. He had seen the snitch just as Higgs. They were racing shoulder to shoulder. The Slytherin seeker jammed into Harry making him veer off passing by a column of the cheering crowd. Then they both darted speeding toward the ground.

Few feet from the ground, Higgs moved off as he did not want to crash but Harry managed to straighten up his broom horizontally, earning gasps from the crowd. The snitch was just several feet away from him when Harry stood up on his broom standing on his feet. He made a small step forward trying to reach the golden ball with a hand but then suddenly leapt forward falling off the broom. Hopefully he was just a foot from the ground. The crowd gasped as they saw Harry clap his hand before his mouth. It looked he'd be sick. Then he coughed – something gold fell in his hand. It was the snitch.

"I've got the snitch!" – Harry yelled, waving it above his head thus ending the game in complete confusion.

Flint was howling quite a lot though while Harry had the problem with his broom he had taken the Quaffle and scored five times without anyone watching. "He didn't catch it but almost swallowed it." Harry did not hear any of this, as he was in Hagrid's hut with Hermione and Ron having a strong cup of tea.

"It was Snape," – Ron was explaining. "Hermione and I saw him; he was jinxing your broomstick, his eyes fixed on you."

"Rubbish." – Hagrid said. "Why would Snape do somethin' like that?"

"I find this hard to believe too." – Harry said suddenly as he lifted his head.

Ron and Hermione stared at him unbelievably.

"What?" – Ron blurted out finally. "He was jinxing your broom we saw it or you don't believe your friends anymore?"

"I didn't say this." – Harry said in reassuring tone, looking at Ron and Hermione. "I just said I find it hard to believe."

"Why?" – Hermione inquired.

"Look, guys, just because we have some suspicions doesn't mean he's guilty. Innocent till proven guilty as Thant always says. Hagrid, you said that to jinx a broom of the class Nimbus, this would require power Dark Magic, right?"

"Right." – Hagrid confirmed.

"So this would mean that in the school there are – what – how many that are capable of doing it?" – Harry continued.

"Well," – Ron pondered.

"Probably, all the teachers could do it." – Hermione said at once.

"Right but who were there at the time?" – Harry asked reaching his argument. "You said that for the spell to work you have to be in direct line of sight, right?"

"Yes," – Hermione admitted. "But then..."

"Then who was in direct line of sight?" – Harry asked.

"Snape." – Ron answered.

"Was he the only one?" – Harry continued to question.

"Harry, where are you going with this?" – Ron inquired confused.

"Oh, wait!" – Hermione suddenly exclaimed.

Harry all beamed. Hermione's got it now, probably, he thought.

"What?" – Ron turned to Hermione.

"Harry's right." – She said. "He wasn't the only one."

"Then who was it?" – Hagrid asked too.

"Ron, Hermione said that on her way she knocked off Quirrell..." – Harry inserted.

"So?"

"So," – Hermione continued finally getting Harry's thought. "He was on the first row in direct line of sight of Harry."

"Are you saying Quirrell jinxed your broom?" – Ron asked incredulously.

"It is possible, Ron." – Harry said. "Think about it – if it is possible to jinx the broom, it is also possible to counter it."

"Okay..." – Ron was uncertain where this was going.

"So if this spell is so powerful it should have worked but it didn't why?" – Harry continued. "My broom was lurching, trying to jerk me off. I was barely holding and yet I had the feeling that somehow the broom was resisting so if it really was this would be the following: someone's jinxing the broom and someone countering the jinx. All this would produce the effects I was experiencing." – Harry explained.

"You're right." – Hermione agreed. "The broom was resisting and since the brooms can't resist on their own unless there's some defense, this would certainly mean someone was countering it."

"Also, you said, it took Snape less than minute to realize he was burning but in this time my broom stabilized. So if Snape was jinxing it that would have been sufficient to throw me off, would it not be, Ron?"

"Hmm, well, as you put it that way I have to agree." – Ron admitted. "But then this would leave..."

"Quirrell, yes, it would leave him." – Harry nodded.

"But why would Quirrell want you dead?" – Ron asked.

"I don't know." – Harry said. "But I intend to find out."

"How?"

"Well, it seems we know nothing about him." – Harry said.

"And it is time that we do." – Hermione finished his thought.

"You three are of yer heads." – Hagrid joined in.

"I don't think so, Hagrid." – Harry shook his head. "There is something odd too. I mean we find Snape and Quirrell all the time close to the third floor."

"Yeah," – Ron agreed. "Where this three headed dog is?"

"The Cerberus, Ron." – Harry corrected.

"Who told ya about Fluffy?" – Hagrid suddenly blurted out.

"Fluffy?" – Hermione exclaimed.

"That thing has a name?" – Ron asked stunned.

"Of course, he does he's mine." – Hagrid replied gruffly. "Bought him off a Greek fellow I met las' year in the pub – I leant him to Dumbledore ter guard the..."

"Guard what?" – Hermione asked eagerly.

"In Merlin's name!" – Hagrid exclaimed as he had realized he had said than he should have. "No more questions! That's top secret that is."

"But Hagrid," – Hermione objected. "Someone's trying to steal it."

"Nonsense, no one's going to steal let alone a Hogwarts teacher – they'd do nothing of the kind."

"She's right, Hagrid." – Ron continued to pressure him. "Someone's already tried."

"I tellin' you all, you're wron'." – Hagrid said stubbornly. "I don't know why Harry's broom bein' acting this way, but nor Snape neither Quirrell wouldn't try to kill a student! Now you listen, you three, don't meddle into thin' that don't concern ya. Forget the dog, forget what's

it guarding, that's between Professor Dumbledore and Nicolas Flamel - - "

"Aha, so there's a Nicolas Flamel involved, is there?" – Harry exclaimed pleased.

Hagrid did not reply but looked furious with himself.

On the next morning, in a spare classroom, the Capers met. Harry told Cassie, Xsi and Alamar all about yesterday and Hagrid's drop of a Nicolas Flamel. Cassie frowned.

"Who is Nicolas Flamel?" – Alamar asked.

"I have no idea." – Hermione and Xsi replied in unison.

"The name sounds familiar though." – Harry interjected suddenly.

"It does?" – Cassie looked up.

"Yeah, I've heard it somewhere though I'm not sure where or maybe I've read it somewhere, I don't know." – Harry replied shrugging.

"Oh as well, so Loki..." – Alamar said. "Going back to the castle for Christmas?"

Cassie ignored Alamar's question. She was rethinking what Harry, Ron and Hermione had told them and something was definitely bothering her.

"Loki?" – Xsi looked at her sister.

"There's something that bugs me." – Cassie replied.

"Like?" – Alamar inquired.

"Well, Nimbus is right about one thing. We seem to notice Snape and Quirrell too often around the third floor. And as I come to think of it, at the night of Halloween, Snape headed straight to the third floor while Quirrell warned of the troll. Something here doesn't fit." – She answered.

"Well, Snape headed to steal whatever was there and got bitten..."

"Not necessarily." – Cassie shook her head. "What if – highly hypothetically – what if Snape was heading to see if everything is fine with whatever is there...and Quirrell...Quirrell..."

Hermione was following Cassie's thoughts and as Loki trailed off finished her thoughts, "Quirrell could have been creating a diversion so to get to whatever is there first but Snape cuts his way..."

"Yeah," – Cassie nodded in agreement. "My thought exactly."

"And then willy-nilly comes along with Snape and McGonagall to the bathroom where Ron, Alamar and Nimbus were battling with the troll." – Xsi finished the hypothesis.

"Girls, this sounds crazy." – Alamar remarked. "And..."

"And we have no proof of it." – Ron finished his sentence.

"That's why, Pluto, it's called a hypothesis." – Cassie said.

"Yes, but one that strangely fits in." – Hermione observed.

"Alright, even if, and I stress on the if, it fits – what are the motives?" – Alamar inquired.

"Well, we don't know." – Cassie shrugged. "Yet."

"Oh as well, so Loki..." – Alamar said. "Going back to the castle for Christmas?"

"No, Mom and Dad will be going to Egypt where cousin Freela is. She had invited them over." – Cassie replied making a grimace. "So we would be spending it here."

"Oh, well. Harry, you could come with me." – Alamar said. "Mom'd be delighted."

"I'm sure she'll but I'll stay – to find anything about Flamel." – Harry declined politely.

"It's okay, mate." – Alamar grinned. "Hermione, you?"



"I'll be going with Mom and Dad, skiing."

"Really, that's cool."

"What's skiing?" – Ron asked bemused.

"Tell you another time." – Alamar smiled. "Though, the magic skiing is way funnier and better."

"How do you mean that?" – Hermione asked bewildered.

Alamar leaned forward and explained in whispers, then Hermione's eyes widened in surprise, before she rolled on the floor laughing.

"I told you!" – Alamar laughed.

"If only I could try it." – Hermione said, fighting for air.

"Well, if you could pass by, maybe we could organize something." – Alamar suggested.

"I don't know but I'll ask Mom and Dad." – Hermione said.

"Ron, what about you?" – Cassie asked.

"Ah, we're staying too. Mom and Dad will be going to Romania to visit my brother Charlie. He works there with Dragons." – Ron replied.

"Dragons – cool." – Xsi exclaimed excited. "It must be quite the job. I like Dragons."

"Well, tell something that you don't." – Harry interjected.

"Well, okay." – Alamar said. "I must be off – classes."

"Which?" – Xsi inquired.

"Potions with Snape." – Alamar replied, and walked off the room.

"So where do you propose we start looking for Flamel?" – Cassie asked.

"Well, the obvious place – into the library." – Hermione replied.

"Yeah, of course, how stupid of me to even ask." – Cassie admitted laughing.

"Never thought I'd hear that." – Harry said.

The next two weeks, the Capers spent time into the library looking for Nicolas Flamel but with little success as they did not know where to start. They did not know what Flamel was into. They looked into Great Wizards of the Twentieth Century, Notable Magical Names of our Time, Important Modern Magical Discoveries, and a study of Recent Developments in Wizardry, but nothing. It was as though he did not exist. Hermione started to think that he might be a muggle but this seemed highly unlikely.

Hagrid, of course, was avoiding them for some time, making sure he did not make another slip.

As Christmas was approaching, in a morning in mid-December, Hogwarts woke in several feet of snow. The lake had frozen solid while the peaks of the surrounding mountains were glittering like silver spears. The Twins were so exited that they were even punished for enchanting snowballs to bounce off the turban of Professor Quirrell. Only few owls managed to battle their way through the stormy weather and then they had to be nursed by Hagrid before flying off again.

Unfortunately for most students while the Towers and the Great Hall were full of warmth the rest of the castle was icy cold. Only few students were actually unaffected and those were Harry, Cassie and Xsi, as the Solmyr Castle was like that all the time. Of course, it was not very pleasant, especially in Snape's classes where their breath was turning to mist so the students kept close to their cauldrons.

"I do feel sorry," – Malfoy was saying in the last Potions class. "For all those who would be staying in the school for Christmas as they are not wanted at home." Of course, Draco who had become overbearing and bitter since Slytherin's loss, was saying this only to taunt with Harry but Harry was ignoring him completely, as he did not feel affected by his words.

He was not going to go home even if Thant and Saptienna were at home because he wanted to find this Nicolas Flamel, and to learn more about Hogwarts. Besides, it was interesting for him to spend Christmas in a castle such as Hogwarts, to have some diversity.

As they left Potions, a large fir tree was blocking the way ahead. A loud puffing sound told them that Hagrid was behind the tree.

"Want some help there, Hagrid?" – Ron proposed while sticking his head through the branches.

"Nah, not all, I'm fine thanks, Ron." – Hagrid replied.

"Would you mind moving that out of the way?" – The cold drawl of Malfoy came from behind.

"Move it yourself." – Ron shot.

Malfoy replied something that made Ron's ears go red, and in the second Ron dived over at Malfoy but just as Snape came up the stairs.

"WEASLEY!"

Ron released Malfoy's robes at once but was watching him murderously. Harry assumed that Malfoy must have insulted Ron, since this was his favorite sport besides insulting Harry.

"He was provoked, Professor." – Hagrid defended Ron. "He was insultin' his family."

"Be that as it may, fighting is against the rules." – Snape replied silkily. "Five points from Gryffindor, and be happy they're not more. Now, move along."

Ron muttered something under his breath.

"Cheer up, it's nearly Christmas." – Hagrid said. "Come and see the Great Hall. It's wonderful."

So they followed Hagrid and the tree to the Great Hall where Professors McGonagall and Flitwick were busy with the decorations.

"Ah, Hagrid, the last tree, put it there in the corner." – Flitwick said with his tiny little voice.

The Great Hall was spectacular. Festoons of holly and mistletoe were hanging around the walls, and twelve towering Fir Christmas trees stood in each corner and around the room, some glittering with hundreds of silver candles, some sparkling with tiny icicles.

"How many days have you got till Holidays?" – Hagrid asked.

"Just one." – Hermione replied. "Which reminds me boys, we still have time to hit the library before lunch."

"The library?" – Hagrid exclaimed surprised as he followed them out of the Great Hall. "Bein' a bit keen, are we?"

"Oh, we're not working." – Harry told him brightly. "We'll be looking for Nicolas Flamel, ever since you mentioned him."

"You wha?" – Hagrid exclaimed shocked. "Listen here you all – drop it. It isn' your business to know wha..."

"We just know to know who he is, that's all." – Hermione said.

"Unless you'd like to save us the trouble?" – Harry added. "We've looked over a hundred books and still nothing but if you give us just a hint – I'm sure I've read his name somewhere."

"I'm sayin' nothin'." – Hagrid said flatly.

"Oh as well, we'll find him on our own." – Ron shrugged while they darted to the library.

But the time they spent in the library did not produce any results though Hermione made a list of subjects while Ron pulled books at random, and Harry even tried to snatch a book of the restricted section but Madam Pince, the librarian, caught him, and he had to leave.

"You will keep looking while I'm away, won't you?" – Hermione asked five minutes later as they're leaving the library.

"Of course, but you could ask your parents." – Ron had the sudden idea. "It'd be safe."

"Very safe, Ron, they are dentists." – Hermione said. "Muggles, you haven't forgotten, have you?"

"Apparently." – Ron sulked up.

"Well, have nice holidays." – Hermione wished, and darted off.

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 11

### Sacred Phoenix's Christmas gift

Christmas was close now and the atmosphere in the castle was growing more cheerful and joyful providing enough distraction for Harry and Ron so the search for Nicolas Flamel had taken a back seat. They spent most of their time in the common room, which in true holiday style was emptier. Sitting on the armchairs close to the fire, they were eating everything they could put on a fork – bread, muffins, and marshmallows as well as plotting ways to get rid of Malfoy and his gorillas expelled (though this was surely unlikely).

Ron and Harry got to play wizard chess (which in purposes resembled the muggle one it had one slight difference – the figures were quite alive and screamed a lot when in battle). Ron's set as almost everything he possessed was very old but this was not a minus as Ron knew his chessmen well and had no trouble at all making them do what he wanted.

It was obvious that Harry was not playing for the first time as he had played with Alamar every now and then. Harry was using Seamus' chessmen as he did not have his own. Of course, Harry was no match for Ron, though in one game he forced his friend to use all his cunning and strategic abilities in order to win. From time to time Harry was being helped by Percy, which turned out to be a bad call.

On Christmas Eve, Harry went to bed looking forward for the next morning, which to all children spelled – fun, food and the most important – presents, which was the best part of Christmas. Yes, getting presents was a wonder like no other though for Harry it was sometimes somewhat weird as Solmyr family had odd traditions. Two Christmases ago, he had received a pot for flowers full of some grey dust, or the wraith doll from Cassie and the skeleton from Xsi.

On the next morning, Harry woke up early. At the foot of his bed, he saw a large pile of presents.

"Merry Christmas!" – Ron wished as he was getting out of bed and turning to his pile, which was slightly bigger than Harry's.

"Merry Christmas!" – Harry wished as well.

Harry bent to his pile. Atop he found a parcel wrapped in dark brown paper where it was scrawled – To Harry from Hagrid. Inside, Harry found a roughly cut wooden flute, probably hand made by Hagrid. Harry blew it – a sound resembling an owl came out of it. The next parcel contained a large box of Chocolate Frogs from Hermione. Then there was a small signed by Loki. Harry took an apprehensive stance. His sister's ideas of a present scared him but as he opened it he found it full with Stink Pellets making him wonder how Loki had achieved this given that the pellets were on Filch's list for forbidden items. The next package was signed Trivia containing the ever strange object called Screaming Yo-Yo (which is not very different from the muggle except it screeches every time one uses it).

There were four parcels left. The top one was from Thant, Saptienna and Moandor containing a card singing Merry Christmas in all languages (well not simultaneously of course – that will make a horrifying noise). Next, was Alamar's present, which made Harry smile. It was a new chess set.

In the next one, Harry found a hand knitted emerald green sweater and a large box of homemade fudge.

"Every year, Mom makes a sweater." – Ron explained. "And she makes mine always maroon."

"This is very nice of her," – Harry said while tasting the fudge.

The last parcel was very light as Harry was lifting it up. Something fluid and silvery grey slithered to the floor where it remained in gleaming folds. Ron quickly left his presents aside while gasping.

"I know what this is."

"You do?" – Harry raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah, well, at least I think I do."- Ron said coming to Harry's bed jumping over Hermione's Every Flavor Beans. "They are very rare."

"They who?"- Harry asked perplexed.

Ron picked up the shining silvery cloth and put it around Harry who felt very oddly. It was strange on touch like water woven into solid material.

"They, not they, it is called an invisibility cloak." – Ron said with reverence in his voice. "See!"

Harry looked down and gaped. His body was gone. He ran to the mirror and looked into it. He only saw his disembodied head floating into the air. He then pulled the cloak over his head and vanished completely. A note fell out it.

"Something fell." – Ron observed.

Harry picked it up. It was written in a narrow, loopy way he'd never seen before as he read: 'Your father left this in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you. Use it well. A Very Merry Christmas to you.' There was no signature. Harry stared at the note. He felt strange while Ron was admiring the cloak.

"I'd give anything for one of these." – Ron said still admiring the cloak but when his look fell on his friend he quickly asked. "What's the matter Harry?"

"Nothing," – Harry lied.

He did not want to share his thoughts with Ron on this one. He felt it too personal. It had belonged to his birth father. It was also made him wonder who had sent it to him. It was a strange sensation holding a piece of his past but a piece that was more precious than the most precious diamond in the world.

Harry did not have time to ponder more about it as the dormitory's doors flung open and the Twins barged in. He placed the cloak out of sight. For the moment, he felt sharing with no one.

"Merry Christmas!"

"Hey, Harry's got one too." – George observed.

The twins were already wearing their blue sweaters each with one yellow letter F and respectively G.

"And Harry's better than ours." – Fred said while holding up Harry's sweater. "I guess she makes more of an effort if you are not family."



"Ron, why aren't you wearing yours?" – George asked, a wide, warm smile shining on his face. "Come on, put it on, they are lovely and warm."

"I hate maroon." – Ron muttered under his breath but pulled it over his head.

"Well, Harry hasn't got a letter." – Fred observed. "She thinks you don't forget your name. But we aren't stupid – we know we're called Gred and Forge."

"What's all that noise?"

Percy Weasley stuck his head through the door, looking disapproving. He had clearly gotten through half his presents as he, too, carried a lumpy sweater, which Fred seized.

"P for Prefect! Get it on, Percy, come on, we're all wearing ours, even Harry's got one too."

"I...don't...want..." – Percy said while the twins forced the sweater over his head, knocking his glasses askew.

"And you're not sitting with the prefects either." – George said. "Christmas is family time."

They frog-marched Percy out of the room, his arms pinned to his side by the sweater.

Harry had had many Christmas dinners but none as the one now in Hogwarts' Great Hall – hundreds fat, roasted turkeys, mountains of roast and boiled potatoes, platters of chipolatas, tureens of buttered peas, silver boats of thick, rich gravy and cranberry sauce, and stacks of wizard crackers every few feet on the table. Harry pulled a cracker with Fred that didn't just bang but darted into the air like a cannon then engulfed them into blue smoke. Up at the High Table, Professor Dumbledore had swapped his pointy hat for a flowered bonnet, and was chuckling at a joke Professor Flitwick had just read him.

Flaming Christmas puddings followed the turkeys. Percy nearly broke his tooth on a silver sickle embedded into his slice. Harry watched Hagrid become redder and redder in the face as he called

for more wine, finally kissed Professor McGonagall on the cheek, who, to Harry's surprise, giggled and blushed, her top hat lopsided.

Harry and the Weasleys spent a happy afternoon having a furious snowball fight. Then cold, wet, they returned to the fire in Gryffindor common room, where Harry broke his new chess set by losing spectacularly to Ron. He suspected he wouldn't have lost that much hadn't Percy tried to help him all the time.

After a meal of turkey sandwiches, crumpets, trifles and Christmas cake, everyone felt too full and sleepy to do much before bed except sit and watch Percy chasing Fred and George around the common room for stealing his prefect badge.

It has been a wonderful Christmas but something was nagging Harry all day. It was not until he climbed into bed that he was free to think about it – the invisibility cloak. Ron full of turkey fell to sleep almost immediately. Harry leaned over the side of his bed and pulled out the cloak.

It has been his father's...his father's. He let the material flow over his hands, light as air and smoother than silk. The note said – use it well. And a thought formed in Harry's mind that was saying – try it, try it now.

He wrapped the cloak around himself and slipped out of bed. Looking down at his legs he was only moonlight and shadows. It was an odd feeling.

Use it well.

Suddenly Harry had an epiphany – the whole school was now open to him. He could go anywhere. Excitement flooded every fiber of his body – anywhere, and Filch would not even see him, anywhere – the Library – the Great Hall – anywhere.

Harry paused for a moment wondering whether he should wake Ron but something stopped him sharing this time – it was his father's cloak. He wanted to try it alone so he crept out of the dormitory, across the common room and out through the hole, ignoring the Fat Lady's question – who's there.

Harry headed straight to the Library and more precisely to the Restricted Section where he could look for Nicolas Flamel without anyone bothering him.

The library was pitch-black. Harry lit a lamp to see his way and number of the rows of books. It was really funny seeing the lamp floating in mid air, and even though he felt himself carry the lamp it was giving him the creeps – creeps – Harry thought – it would be a good payback to his sisters. This thought made him smile.

The Restriction section was right at the back of the library. Stepping carefully over the rope that separated those books from the rest, Harry lifted up the lamp to read the titles, which unfortunately did not tell him much. Most titles had peeling, faded golden letters, some of which spelled in languages Harry did not understand.

The books were creepy. Harry thought seeing a stain on one of the books that looked horribly like blood. Other books were whispering. It was indeed creepy. But he had to start somewhere so he put the lamp gently on the floor then took the first book at sight. The book proved to be much heavier than it looked at first glance. He balanced it on his knee but lost balance and the book fell open.

A bloodcurdling shriek pierced the silence – the book was screaming. Harry shut it but the shriek continued – one high, unbroken, earsplitting noise. He stumbled backward knocking over his lamp, which went out at once. Harry panicked as he heard hurried footsteps coming down the corridor outside. Stuffing the book at its place, he ran for it. On the way out he passed by Filch who was looking straight through him, the shrieking of the book still ringing in his ears.

Harry came to a sudden halt in front of a tall suit of armor. He was so busy getting away from the library that he did not pay attention where he was going. Looking around, he realized he had no idea where he was. He knew of suit of armor near the kitchens but it was five floors above.

Suddenly a voice made the blood on his face drain. It was the greasy voice of Snape and the stuttering of Quirrell.

"When the time comes..." – Snape was saying.

"A...a...Severus...I...I..." – Quirrell stammered.

"You don't want me as an enemy. We'll have a nice talk some other time."

Then another noise made Harry's heart jump up his throat.

"Excuse me, Professors, but I found this lamp in the Restricted Section of the Library. It is still hot, which means that there are students out of bed."

Wherever Harry was Filch obviously knew a shortcut, because his voice was getting nearer.

"The Restricted Section?" – Snape replied. "Well, they can't be far. We'll catch them."

Harry stood rooted to the spot as Filch, Snape and Quirrell came around the corner. They couldn't see him but it was a narrow corridor. If they came much nearer him they could knock him off, the invisibility cloak was not making you disembodied.

He backed slowly away as quietly as possible. There was a door ajar on his left. It was his only hope. He squeezed through it, holding his breath, trying not to move it, and to his relief managed to get inside the room without anyone noticing him. They walked straight past, and Harry leaned against the wall, deeply breathing as their footsteps faded away. That had been very close, so close. It was only a few seconds when he noticed anything about the room he had hidden in.

The room was probably an unused classroom. The dark shapes of desks and chairs piled against the wall filled the room. There was even a wastepaper basket upturned but leaning on the wall opposite of Harry there was something that definitely did not belong there as though put by someone there only to keep it out of the way.

It was a magnificent mirror, as high as the ceiling with ornate golden frame, standing on two clawed feet. An inscription was carved atop, which read – Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohi. His panic vanished at once as he advanced toward the mirror to see his reflection but as he stood in front of it he did not see his reflection instead he froze dead in his tracks.

He had to clap his mouth with a hand to stop the yell of surprise. His heart was pounding way faster than the book in the library that screamed. He whirled around but the room was empty. He was alone and yet when he looked back at the mirror – there were people staring at him. He turned around again but there was no one. Was the mirror showing only invisible people? There was a woman standing right behind him, smiling at him with a hand on his shoulder. Harry reached for his shoulder – if the woman was really there he would feel her – their reflections were so close together but Harry felt only the air.

She was a pretty woman. She had dark red hair and her eyes – her eyes were just like his - bright green and exactly the same shape. The woman was crying and smiling at the same time. The tall, thin, black haired man beside her put his arm around her. He wore glasses and his hair was very untidy, stuck up at the back just – just like his.

Harry's face was now very close to the mirror almost touching his reflection.

"Mom?" – He whispered. "Dad?"

They just looked at him and smiled. And slowly Harry looked carefully into the faces of the other people in the mirror, and saw other pairs of green eyes like his, other noses like his, even a little old man who looked as though he had Harry's knobby knees – Harry was looking at his family for the first time in his life.

Something in Harry gave an ache – it was half joy half sadness. He was happy living with Thant and Saptienna but deep inside his heart he had always wanted to know, to see who his real parents were. And now, this mirror had answered his plea, his deepest heart's desire. The sensation was an odd one. And the Potters were smiling at him and waving. It was heart-rending and elating. Their presence was giving him wings. But then something unusual happened.

"We are here for you, my son." – Harry jumped off for he could've sworn hearing his father's voice. Then he felt the wand in his pocket heat red hot and an unearthly song coming out of it.

"Dad?" – Harry barely whispered. He was not sure his father would hear him.

"Yes, Harry." – James Potter's ghostly voice came from behind.

Harry turned around and gaped. Terror and elation surged through him. Right in front of him, the figures of his mother and father stood. They had more substance than a ghost and yet they were not truly flesh.

"Harry," – Lily Potter's voice was soft and caring. She reached for Harry and caressed him gently. The sensation was very odd but it felt warm. Harry's heart had yet again started to pound fast in his chest, this time faster than ever before. "My dearest Harry," And she embraced him into a hug.

"Mom," – Harry stammered. He was feeling truly happy now. He instinctively tightened his grip.

Words alone can not describe this kind of feeling. The mirror of Erised does not possess the power to what Harry was experiencing but something else did, something that was much more powerful, a magic beyond any other.

"Harry, your trials are just beginning but you will manage." – James said.

"Yes, Harry, your father is right. And we will always be with you." – Lily added.

"I miss you." – Harry said swallowing his tears.

"We know but you must be strong." – James smiled.

"I'm trying."

"And also before we go," – Lily added. "Thank Thant and Saptienna every day for their warmth and love. We are grateful that they have taken you since we..."

James hugged Lily. "Yes, Harry is safe with them." And then patted Harry on the head.

"I will." – Harry said. "They are indeed..."

"We are so proud of you." – James said. "Keep..."

"I will." – Harry promised. Tears were falling freely on his cheeks and as his parents started to fade away he asked. "Will I see you again?"

James and Lily smiled. "Yes, three more times." And with that they vanished completely.

Harry stood rooted on the spot his eyes fixed on the place where his parents had been just a second ago. How long he stood there he did not know. Curiously enough he did not turn again to look in the mirror for he was in another world in his own thoughts. The unearthly song had faded slowly away but it did not take his happiness (though he also felt sadness). A distant noise threw him out of his thoughts. He put the cloak on and returned to his bed where he fell asleep with a happy smile.

"You could have woken me up." – Ron said, crossly.

"I can show it to you tonight if want." – Harry proposed.

"I can't wait to meet you family." – Ron said eagerly.

"And I want to see yours – all your family."

"Oh, that's easy, just come by this summer and you will. Anyway, it may be showing only dead people. Shame you found nothing about Flamel. Have some beacon, Harry. Why aren't you eating?"

The truth was that right on the next morning Harry was feeling really odd. The night experience had changed him. On one side, he wanted to go back to the mirror and see his parents and his entire family line but on the other side another feeling that he couldn't define was stopping him. Having all these new feelings in him right was the one thing that was setting his mind into a very direction and he did not really care about Flamel or anything else. He needed time to let the new emotions, feelings and thoughts sink in.

The only concern he had now was should he go back or not. Can he stand the pain of seeing them again without being able to touch

them, talk to them and they talk back to him. He could not explain how last night's happening came to be but he was happy it did. It was this experience that gave him the strength not to look again into the mirror for a very long time. But if he goes back would he have the strength not to look. This Harry did not know. The problem was that the desire to see them was strong.

Retracing his way back to the mirror however did not prove very easy but Harry was certain he would find it. They were roaming the corridors under the cloak for over an hour.

"I'm freezing." – Ron groaned. "Let's go back. We can come another time."

"No, it's here." – Harry had spotted the armor suit and pushed the door open. Harry dropped the cloak but kept his distance from the mirror. The other feeling in him was keeping him away.

"I can't see anything." – Ron observed.

"Here, stand right in front of the mirror." – Harry said showing Ron where to stand. He was curious what would Ron see for something was telling him that one can not share what he sees with another. "What do you see?"

"Well, I'm not seeing your family." – Ron replied.

"Move closer and tell me what you see?"

Ron obeyed. He moved closer and gasped. "Blimey," – Ron exclaimed. "I'm...I look older and I'm also Head Boy."

"Really?" – Harry was smiling even though he was not sure why. "What else?"

"Wow, I'm holding the House Cup and the Quidditch one, and wow I'm Quidditch captain too."

Ron stepped away from the mirror and looked at Harry. "Do you think the mirror shows the future?"



"No," – Harry shook head. He had taken notice of the writing on the mirror and quickly understood its meaning and why he was smiling earlier. "I don't think so. How could it when my parents are dead?"

"Yeah sorry mate," – Ron said. "You have Cassie and Xsi."

"Yeah, I do." – Harry agreed. "And Thant and Saptienna."

"But then what does this...I mean this is a strange thing."

"I know." – Harry said. "We should probably be going."

"Yeah, before someone catches us here."

As he said it Mrs. Norris' luminous eyes came around the door. They stood absolutely still as the cat looked straight at them making them wonder whether the cat could actually see them through the invisibility cloak but shortly after, Mrs. Norris left.

The next morning, the snow hadn't melted. Ron and Harry were sitting in the common room silently. Harry's thoughts had again gone in the direction of the mirror though for a different purpose while Ron was eyeing his friend with concern.

"Harry, do you want to play chess?" – He asked.

"No."

"Do you want to go outside and visit Hagrid?"

"No, you go ahead." – Harry replied.

"Harry, I know what you're thinking about – don't."

"What?"

"Well, I don't like it besides, you've had too many close shaves already – Snape, Filch, Quirrell and Mrs. Norris. So what if they can't see you? What if they walk right at you? What if you knock something over?"

Harry did not reply though realizing that he and Ron were thinking about separate things. Last night Harry had a curious though very

scary idea. But he did not want to take Ron with him besides he won't be able to see any way.

Harry then stood up and exited the common room. He wondered aimlessly his mind preoccupied with his idea for tonight. His wandering took him near the Great Hall but just one look at it and Harry had no desire going in. He was just turning around when he bumped into Loki.

"Hey watch it." – Cassie exclaimed. "Oh, hey Harry."

"Hey, Cassie." – Harry said still in his thoughts.

Cassie looked at him carefully. She noticed quickly that he had something on his heart.

"Nimbus, what is it?"

"Nothing." – Harry lied but Cassie did not believe him. "Thanks for the present."

She was about to ask him again when Harry spotted Ron, and quickly disappeared. He thought he was coming to dissuade him from pursuing the mirror thus he walked away.

"Ron?" – Cassie called.

Ron saw her and stopped.

"What's the matter with Harry? He seemed a bit off."

"Oh, it's nothing." – Ron quickly replied.

"Nothing?" – Cassie repeated looking sternly at Ron who went all red under her stare.

"Nothing."

"Ron?"

"Loki!" – Xsi called coming down the marble staircase. "I found something...what's going on?"

"It's Nimbus. He seemed a bit off and I'll bet Ron knows why." – Cassie replied. "Don't you?"

"I have no idea what you are talking about." – Ron said walking away.

"Ron, come back!" – Cassie called him.

But Ron did not listen as he hurried back to the common room but just as he has climbed one floor the girls appeared before him. He stopped rooted with shock.

"How did you do that?" – He asked bewildered.

"Well, we're learning our way around here." – Xsi replied all beaming. "So what's with Harry?"

"Nothing."

"Come on, you can tell us." – Xsi said warmly.

"Or you'll be stalking you at every pace." – Cassie added gently, her eyes deviously flashing.

"Off, it's that bloody mirror."

"What mirror?" – Both girls looked bemused at him.

"Well..." – And Ron told them about the mirror they went to last night, and the one Harry had discovered the night before that.

The girls looked at each other with different feelings in them. This mirror must be something strange. Yet it had showed Harry his true family and they could understand why he wanted to see it again.

"You know, Ron, as a good friend you should let Harry see." – Cassie said after a while.

"Yeah," – Xsi agreed. "I mean put yourself in his shoes – if you haven't ever seen your family and now that you have the chance – you'll let no one stand on your way."

"You're probably right." – Ron nodded. "But he is testing chance."

"For the chance of seeing his family, as I know Nimbus, he would test hell, if necessary." – Cassie said. "Let him be, Ron."

"Okay!" – Ron sighed. "I'm just worried that's all."

"We understand," – Xsi said. "Anyway, would you like us to show you some shortcuts?"

"Yeah cool." – Ron agreed, and they darted away.

That night, Harry found his way, way more easily than the night before. He was walking fast making a bit more noise than necessary but he had a theory to test so he cared about nothing else. He entered the room quickly reaching the mirror. He stood before it, took a deep breath, concentrating on what he wanted most right now. Nothing was going to stop him on his way to find out, nothing but...

"So...back again, Harry?"

He turned around and saw sitting on one of the desks no other than Albus Dumbledore. He must have walked right past him but as he was in such a hurry he hadn't noticed him.

"I'm sorry, Professor, I...didn't see you, sir."

"Hmm, strange how blinded one becomes when invisible." – Dumbledore said though Harry noticed he was beaming.

"So..." – Dumbledore said, slipping off the desk to sit on the floor with Harry. "You, like hundreds before you, have found the delights of the Mirror of Erised."

"I did not know it's called like that." – Harry said.

"But I expect you've realized by now what it does?"

Harry knew at least he hoped he had understood its purpose but replied cautiously nonetheless. "It showed me my family and..."

"And it showed your friend Ron himself as Head Boy?"

"How do you know that?" – Harry asked astounded.

"I don't need a cloak to become invisible." – Dumbledore replied.  
"Now can you think what the mirror show us all?"

Harry visibly relaxed. It seemed Dumbledore had not been present on his first visit. Something was telling him that the mirror probably does not do what he had experienced though he hoped knowing what exactly it does for this was the reason why he came back. He looked into the professor's eyes that were sparkling behind the half moon spectacles and wondered what to tell him.

"The mirror shows us our heart's deepest desires." – Harry said finally.

Dumbledore looked surprised of Harry's answer even if on some point he had expected the right answer. But Harry surprised him further.

"Ron has always been last in everything so he stands before the mirror seeing himself better than all of his family. He thought he was seeing the future but that time I noticed the inscription on the mirror. And it got me thinking – could it be that simple? The inscription is written backwards or in reflection as it is a mirror. It reads – Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi and it says – I show not your face but your heart's desire. Thant always says that the simplest explanation is usually the right one. Last night I understood how right he is."

Dumbledore did not say anything for a long time. He was probably mesmerized by Harry's way of reasoning. But it was also probably because he was one of the few that has figured it out without anyone's help. His interpretation was the right one.

"Yes, this is what it does." – Dumbledore said finally. "Many have wasted their lives before it as it shows neither truth nor the future, which is also why tomorrow the mirror will be moved to a new home."

Harry was certainly not happy to hear that. And it must have appeared on his expression as Dumbledore added.

"I must ask you not to go look for it again, Harry. But should you come across it again, you will be prepared. Now, why don't you put this marvelous cloak back on, and get off to bed?"

"Sir – can I ask you something?"

"Obviously you just did." – Dumbledore said smiling. "But you can ask me one more thing, however."

"What do you see when you look in the mirror?"

"I? I see myself holding a pair of thick, woolen socks."

Harry looked bemused at him.

"One can never have enough socks." - Dumbledore replied. "Another Christmas passed and people keep on giving me books so I didn't get my pair."

It was when Harry reached his bed that he realized that Dumbledore might not have been quite truthful. But then, he thought, it was a rather personal question.

And true to his word, Harry did not go to look for the mirror. The only negative effect of seeing the mirror was that he had terrible nightmares – seeing his parents again all beaming at him, and then an intense green light mixed with the shivering cold laughter. He did not achieve his goal in finding about that cold laugh but he would find a way.

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 12

### Unforeseen Complication

Hermione returned before the beginning of the term. She was of course disappointed that the boys have not looked for Flamel but she set it aside as soon as she learnt that Harry had been wandering around the castle for three consecutive nights ('What if Filch caught you?'). Harry, of course, had not told anyone (including Ron) what happened the first time he found the mirror. He distinctly had the impression that it will scare the hell out of his friends.

But the problem was that they have not gotten anywhere near solving the mystery and Flamel was the key to that. They had begun giving up though Harry was still certain he had read about him somewhere.

Once the term started they continued their search though Harry couldn't help much as Quidditch practices have resumed. Wood, their captain, was getting more fanatical every day but Harry was on his side. If they were to beat Hufflepuff they would pass Slytherin and take the lead in the House Cup for the first time in the seven years.

During the last Quidditch practice, Harry saw Cassie on the field, as have Wood who has landed to see what she wanted. She just whispered a few words to Wood who turned white at once. The rest of the team landed nearby. Wood came to them.

"I've just..." – He started, pronouncing every word with difficulty. "I have bad news. Snape's going to referee the next match. And he would be looking for an excuse to knock points off Gryffindor."

"Snape's refereeing?" – George Weasley spluttered through a mouthful of mud as he had fallen off his broom. "When's he ever refereed a match? He's not going to be fair if we are to overtake Slytherin."

"Well, it's not my fault." – Wood replied. "We have to play so not to give him any excuse to pick on us."

Harry had a different opinion on why Snape had chosen to referee the match. As he came to think of it, it seemed to him that Snape did

not want to give Quirrell another chance to knock Harry off his broom.

As the rest of the team stayed to chat, Harry headed towards the Gryffindor Tower. On his way he met Cassie that was actually waiting for him.

"Nimbus." – She called.

"Cassie."

"You shouldn't play." – Cassie said concerned.

"What? Why?" – Harry eyed her.

"You know perfectly well why not." – Cassie replied.

"You have nothing to worry about." – Harry said.

"I think I do. Last time Snape tried to..."

"It wasn't Snape as you well remember." – Harry cut her off. "I think he wants to referee the match to make sure Quirrell doesn't get the chance to try again. Besides, without me, Gryffindor does not stand a chance."

"I know," – Cassie said. "I'm just concerned."

"The ever thoughtful," – Harry smiled.

"Where are you going?"

"To Gryffindor Tower, to tell the others."

"Alright go and pick up Hermione and Ron then meet us at the abandoned classroom near Charms' class." – Cassie said and strode off.

Harry reached Gryffindor' common room where he found Ron and Hermione were playing chess. Chess was the only thing Hermione ever lost, something Harry and Ron thought was very good for her.



"Don't talk to me for a moment." – Ron said when Harry sat near him. "I need to concen..." – Ron caught sight of Harry's face. "What's the matter?"

"Leave the chess and come with me." – Harry said.

As they were to leave, Neville toppled into the common room. How he had managed to do so was anyone's guess as his legs had been stuck together with what they recognized to be the Leg-Locker Curse.

Everyone laughed except Hermione who performed the counter curse. Neville's legs sprang apart.

"What happened?" – Hermione asked.

"Met Malfoy in the library." – Neville said shakily. "He said he wanted to test this on someone."

"Go to Professor McGonagall." – Hermione urged. "And report him."

"I don't want more trouble." – Neville said shaking head.

"You've got to stand up to him, Neville." – Ron said. "He's used to walk over people, but that's no reason to lie down in front of him and make it easier."

"There's no need to tell me I'm not brave enough to be in Gryffindor – Malfoy has already done that." – Neville choked out.

Harry reached for his pocket where he had a Chocolate Frog, the last from Hermione's Christmas present. He handed it over to Neville who looked like he's going to cry.

"You're worth twelve Malfoys." – Harry said to encourage him. "The sorting hat placed you in Gryffindor. And where did it place Malfoy – in the stinking Slytherin."

Neville's lips twitched in a weak smile while he unfolded the frog.

"Thanks Harry...I'll be going to bed...Do you want the card...I don't collect them."

As Neville walked away, Harry looked at the card.

"Dumbledore again." – He said. "He was the first one I've ever..." – Harry stopped at mid sentence while reading the back of the card then he darted off to his room while Hermione and Ron looked dumbfounded.

Harry returned shortly after with his cloak stuffed under his cloths and gestured them towards the hole. Once there he threw the cloak around them and they strode off the common room.

"Harry, what's the matter?" – Hermione whispered. "Where are we going?"

"You'll see." – He hissed.

They went through the hole, heading towards the Charms cabinet. They had to walk slowly so to avoid making noise. As they reached, Harry tapped on the door and Cassie replied – "We are here". Harry pulled off the cloak and they entered.

"Well, the official return meeting of the Capers is now open." – Cassie announced. "Nimbus, I still think that you should not play. I mean with Snape refereeing."

"I told you," – Harry said tired of Cassie's nagging. "It is not Snape I should be worried about. It's Quirrell. Besides, I've found Flamel."

Everyone looked at him.

"You have?" – Cassie asked with disbelief.

"I told you I remember reading about him somewhere." – Harry said. "And now I remembered where. Here listen..." – Harry took out the Famous Card and read. "Albus Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon blood and with his work in alchemy with Nicolas Flamel."

"Aw!" – Hermione exclaimed excitedly. "Give me the cloak." – She whispered. "I'll be back momentarily."

And she dashed off leaving the others with mystified looks on their faces.

"Where has she gone now?" – Alamar asked.

"Hopefully not to the library." – Ron said.

"By the way, Nimbus, what took you guys so long?" – Xsi asked.

"Oh, Neville delayed us." – Harry replied.

"Yeah, Malfoy's got him with the Leg-locker Curse." – Ron explained.

"That brat!" – Cassie exclaimed angrily. "I think it's time to put him in his place. It seems he hasn't learnt his lesson the first time."

"I agree." – Xsi said. "But we should come up with something else. Snape might get suspicious if we use the same thing twice."

Hermione returned several minutes later. It seemed she had run all the way so she paused to take her breath. She was carrying a large book.

"I took this as light reading." – She said panting. "I've never thought looking inside here. But anyway listen – "Nicolas Flamel is the only known maker of the Philosopher's Stone."

"Of the what?" – Alamar and Ron exclaimed.

"Honestly don't you guys ever read?" – Cassie asked raising an eyebrow.

"The Philosopher's stone!" – Xsi exclaimed. "Of course, the Elixir of Life. Oh, please continue!"

"Thanks – "The ancient study of alchemy deals with the making of the Philosopher's stone, a legendary substance with astonishing powers. The stone would transform any metal into pure gold. It also produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal.

There have been many reports over the centuries for the existence of the stone but the only one known in existence belongs to Nicolas Flamel who celebrated last year his six hundred and sixty-fifth

birthday and enjoys a quiet life with his wife Perenelle (six hundred and fifty-eight)."

"Six hundred?" – Alamar exclaimed. "No wonder we didn't find him under contemporary wizards!"

"The Elixir of Life?" – Ron exclaimed. "Becoming immortal?"

"It means you can't die, Ron." – Hermione said.

"I know what it means." – Ron retorted.

"This would explain why Snape would want it – I mean who wouldn't. Turning metals into pure gold, this is the easiest way to become rich." – Alamar said.

"But don't you see?" – Hermione said. "That's what the dog is guarding. Flamel must have known that the stone is in danger so he had given it to Dumbledore to guard it."

"Wonder where it was before?" – Xsi pondered.

"In Gringotts!" – Ron suddenly exclaimed making everyone turn their heads to him. "Remember a vault was robbed but nothing was taken, which did not make much sense. But someone had emptied it the very same day so whoever tried to steal it got late."

"Yeah, it's possible." – Hermione said.

"Alright, there is another matter to discuss, which the main reason for tonight's meeting is." – Cassie announced.

"Yeah." – Xsi said. "We know now that Snape is after the stone for the obvious reasons..."

"No," – Harry interrupted. The others looked at him. "We got it wrong guys. Snape is not after the stone. It is Quirrell. Think about it – Quirrell was in the pub the very day the vault in Gringotts was supposedly robbed. Quirrell was with Snape and McGonagall when we dealt with the troll on Halloween, and we know for sure that Snape was heading to the third floor while the other teachers were going to the dungeons. So if that was true then how it is that Quirrell was not with the rest? And..."

"There is a flaw in your reasoning Nimbus." – Cassie interrupted. "If that would be true than the same is valid for McGonagall..."

"Not necessarily," – Harry countered. "Quirrell came into the Great Hall where he fainted while Snape headed straight to the third floor. Logically with the teachers running down, Quirrell headed to the..."

"But Nimbus, Snape was the first to run to the third floor." – Xsi objected.

"No, think about it. If Snape was the one why not does it when let's say everyone's asleep, during the night...but what if you create a diversion then you have everyone that could stand on your way anyway going in the opposite direction? It is the perfect set up."

"Trivia, Harry's right." – Cassie agreed.

"Yeah, but then McGonagall?" – Alamar asked.

"Well, it is not difficult to imagine." – Cassie said. "Snape cuts Quirrell off so they have no other choice but joining the teachers. And as you said you've made such a clatter they were bound to find out what's making it and McGonagall was the first to be there."

"Yes, there is also something strange going on between Snape and Quirrell." – Harry continued. "Last time, I saw them Snape was...I don't...probably trying to find out how much Quirrell knows of what defended the stone. On the day of the troll they were together, then we saw them in the school yard coming from the forest, then I saw them again after my escape from the library. I mean it is too much of a coincidence."

"Hmm, Nimbus's got a point." – Cassie nodded.

"Indeed," – Xsi agreed. "Cassie and I also have seen them on the fifth floor obviously talking about something and as usual Quirrell was white in stuttering."

"In this case, I think it prudent that we find out too what protects the stone." – Cassie said.

"What you think that it has insufficient protection?" – Alamar asked jokingly.

"Pluto, Snape and Quirrell are grown up wizards and both of them are quite capable to get through anything." – Cassie countered. "I mean the defenses might be difficult for us, students but for them it will be a joke."

"Besides, it's not such a bad idea." – Xsi inserted.

"For what?"

"To add new defenses." – Xsi said with a devious smile.

"Trivia, you really think we can outthink grown ups?" – Alamar asked.

"Why not? Who would consider it possible that some eleven years olds could come up with something like this? I mean seriously."

"Well, that will be something to laugh about." – Alamar smiled.

"Maybe, sis, but we have to know who made the defenses first." – Cassie said.

"Why not ask Hagrid!" – Ron suggested. Everyone looked at him. Ron's ears went red instantly. "Well, he gave us Flamel though he was not supposed to."

"Good point, Tyr." – Xsi nodded.

"Anyway, we should keep an eye on both Snape and Quirrell." – Hermione concluded.

The next few days, Oliver Wood, Harry's captain, was growing increasingly insane and kept stalking Harry everywhere repeating that he ought to catch the snitch quickly. This was adding to Harry's stress for the upcoming match.

Also, Harry kept running into Snape more often these days too. This started to make him wonder whether he knew they were after the stone though it seemed unlikely and yet he had sometimes the feeling that Snape could read minds.

Finally, the match day came. Harry was quite nervous no matter what he had previously told Hermione and Ron. The very thought of overtaking Slytherin in the championship was wonderful since no one has done in the past seven years but would they be able to pull it off with such a biased referee? Well, Snape was biased since Gryffindor could have a real chance of overtaking Slytherin but on the other hand for some unknown reason Harry was feeling safer. And this feeling was very confusing.

Hermione and Ron wished him luck outside the locker as they headed to find places on the stances. There they found Neville who was surprised to see them with their wands. Little did he or even Harry know that they had been secretly practicing the Leg Locker Curse so if Snape or Quirrell tried to hurt him they would use it on him!

"Now, remember," – Hermione was saying for nth time. "It is Locomotor Mortis!"

"I know, stop nagging." – Ron snapped.

Meanwhile in the locker room, Oliver had just finished explaining his game play to which Harry paid almost no attention.

"Harry, I don't want to put any pressure on you, but if we ever needed a quick catch of the snitch – it is now. We can't give Snape any chance to pick on us."

"Blimey, the whole school is out there." – Fred exclaimed.

"Yeah, even Dumbledore has come." – George added.

Harry looked up. He dashed to Fred and scanned the stances. There it was the silvery beard of Dumbledore. A few stances down he noticed Quirrell's turban. He felt relieved. Quirrell was not going to try it again with Dumbledore watching. For some reason, of course, Snape looked angry. Harry wondered what it might be but he had no time for that.

"Alright, Gryffindors off, we go!"- Oliver's voice streamed with authority.

"You know, I've never seen Snape looking so mean." – Ron told Hermione. "Look – they're off ouch!"

Someone had poked Ron on the back of the head.

"Oh, sorry, Weasley didn't see you!" – Malfoy grinned. "Just wondering how long would Potter last on the broom this time? Anyone want to bet? What about you, Weasley?"

Ron bit his lips but did not answer, as Snape had just awarded Hufflepuff a penalty because George Weasley had directed a bludger at him. Hermione had her eyes fixed on Harry, who was circling the field like a hawk looking for the snitch.

"You know how I think they choose members for the Gryffindor team?" – Malfoy said loudly after a while. "It's people they feel sorry about – like Potter he has no family, Weasleys who have no money and, ha ha, Longbottom, you could join them too – you have no brains."

Neville turned upright red but turned on his seat and faced Malfoy.

"I'm worth twelve of you, Malfoy!"

This only generated a burst of laughter from Malfoy, Crab and Goyle.

"Longbottom, if brains were gold you'd be poorer than Weasley and that's saying something."

Ron's nerves were stretched to the limit. He just turned around slowly barely controlling his obvious anger.

"I'm warning you, Malfoy – just one more word and you would – "

"Ron!" – Hermione said suddenly. "Harry – "

"What? Where?"

Up in the air, Harry had spotted the snitch. He had dived for it gathering speed with the Hufflepuff chaser on his heels. The crowd was exalted with cheers at Harry's spectacular dive. Hermione was standing on her toes, fingers crossed.



"This must be your lucky day, Weasley. Potter must have seen money on the ground." – Malfoy howled.

At this comment, Ron snapped. Before Malfoy knew what was going on Ron was on top of him, wrestling him to the ground. Neville hesitated, then clambered over and assaulted the very confused Crab and Goyle.

"Come on, Harry!" – Hermione screamed, as Harry sped straight at Snape.

But it was not meant to be. The sudden appearance of bricked wall just behind Snape made things complicated. Harry had just the time to alter his course. Snape swiftly turned around and noticed the chaos this wall had created. Up on the stances, Dumbledore was up and muttering something. But the wall did not dissipate.

"What the...?" – Hermione had exclaimed along side everyone else.

It was pure chaos. The chasers on both sides had collided into the unexpected obstacle and fallen onto the ground. Only the beaters on both sides had survived it alongside with Harry. The Hufflepuff chaser Robinson did not have this luck as he was on Harry's tail and hadn't the time even to stop.

But the troubles for Harry did not stop there. Fred, George and Oliver had already landed to help the fallen chasers while something looking like a net was making its way towards Harry who saw it just in time. Harry swirled in the air evading it.

"Ron, Ron," – Hermione was calling then she turned around and saw him over Malfoy beating the hell out of him. She quickly separated the two and pointed. "Look, Harry is in trouble."

Ron looked up and his jaw fell. "What the hell?"

Cassie and Xsi were making their way through the crowd towards them.

"Hermione, Ron," – Xsi shouted. "What's going on up there?"

"Harry's in trouble."

"We can see that but who's doing it?"

Hermione took her binoculars and directed them to the teacher's stand. She located fairly quick Quirrell but by his look she determined that he was just as confused as the teachers were.

"It's not Quirrell." – Hermione announced. "Look." She passed the binoculars to Cassie who made the same observation.

"Then who is it?" – Xsi asked.

Cassie continued to scan with stadium trying to locate the source of this new threat. Behind her, Malfoy, Crab and Goyle were coming up to their senses as they also noticed the panic all around.

Malfoy then spotted Harry in the air trying to evade the flying net. He was amused to a degree but only to a degree. There was something sinister about this phenomenon and something oddly familiar about it. Then suddenly in a flash of memory he recognized it. He was once chased by something like that. His father had used a fire spell to stop it.

"Granger," – Draco turned at her seeing she carried her wand. Hermione was stunned by his call. Draco paused for a moment wandering whether to tell her or not. Two conflicting feelings were fighting in him but the remembered terror won over. He wouldn't want even his enemy, the famous Potter, to go through this. "Cast a fire spell at that net. It is the only thing that can save him."

Hermione stared bewildered at Malfoy. It was the first time Malfoy was not his usual self and he was even giving suggestion as to how to save Harry's life, which she found very difficult to believe. But there was an unseen terror in Malfoy's eyes, something neither Hermione nor anyone else had ever seen.

Up in the air, Harry was starting to have trouble evading this pursuing net. There was something strange about it. Harry was feeling his resistance fading away as though the net itself was projecting or emanating insecurity, doubt, fear.

"Granger, snap out of it." – Draco's voice thundered.

Hermione was still stunned. Draco did not ponder or wait for her. He took the nearby Ron's wand and pointed it in the air. "Ignis Solemn," The spell missed the net and Harry by an inch. He cast the spell again and missed again. "Granger, help me out." Draco frantically said.

But it was Cassie that did. She understood quickly what was happening. She took Hermione's wand.

"Let's trap it between us." – She said to Draco who nodded.

Both shot trying to trap the net in between. But it was not as easy as it intended because Harry had noticed the rays of fire passing near him and was doing everything to evade them as well. But he was not the only one. The teachers had noticed their behavior too and Professor McGonagall was making her way towards them.

"We have to make Potter understand." – Draco muttered.

"We will." – Cassie said. "Shoot one on the right and then I'll direct the other on the left but make sure it is not very close."

They did so and finally up there Harry understood their intentions though he had clearly recognized Draco and was wondering why he was involved. But he had no time to ponder much, this net was not giving him anytime to stop and think things through.

With combined efforts, Cassie and Draco managed to finally pin the net in a closed (so to speak) area where the more accurate Cassie succeeded in striking down the net, which dissipated instantly. The bricked wall that had appeared also vanished. Exhausted Draco and Cassie sat while returning the wands back to the very confused and bewildered Ron and Hermione. Professor McGonagall finally reached them.

"What was all this about?" – She demanded.

Xsi cut in and explained as much as she had understood it. Professor McGonagall stared at the youngsters for a while. She was frowning though not for their reactions. She was more concerned with the sudden appearance of the wall and the net that had directly chased Harry Potter.

The match and Quidditch as a whole were postponed indefinitely. This incident was very unusual as even the Headmaster had not been able to put a stop to it. Malfoy Senior was called to provide clarity as Draco had claimed been chased once by such a net before. Of course, this incident did not bring Harry and Draco on friendly terms or even closer one to the other despite that Harry had to swallow his pride and thank Draco for the idea of how to save his life.

Thant and Saptienna were informed as well and arrived the next day. Draco and Cassie, but essentially Draco had to tell and retell what has happened. This incident was giving ground for much concern. Now, the wizards were thinking of You-Know-Who but Thant was thinking otherwise. He took Saptienna to the Headmaster. There in the office, Thant spoke openly.

"Professor Dumbledore, as much as I respect you I don't agree with your assessment." – Thant began. "Unfortunately, I can only speculate who might have done it. But one thing is for sure Harry was the target. I doubt very much Voldemort or any of his followers knows this kind of spell."

"So you are familiar with the spell that produced...?" – Dumbledore raised an eyebrow.

"Yes," – Thant sighed. "The problem is that there are many that could have cast it."

"And why are you so sure it wasn't...?" – Professor McGonagall that had entered a few minutes ago asked.

"I'm because this spell belongs to Death Magic." – Thant said tiredly. "And there is very little chance that anyone among the wizards would have the power to cast it."

"Yes," – Saptienna approved. "Not to mention that the spell was incomplete. Whoever did it must have been at some distance away. He probably had not full view of what was happening thus making it difficult to fully spread the spell."

"No, it was probably because of Hogwarts's defenses that the spell did not work properly nonetheless it inflicted significant damage." – Thant explained. "Placing Harry and the others in grave danger."

"Thant, dear, they were very lucky." – Saptienna said softly. "Harry has to thank his incredible reflexes."

"Yes and Malfoy's cool intervention." – Thant said then took on pondering state. "Though it makes me wonder why and who would subject that boy to this spell at his early age."

"There is clearly much that is unknown." – Saptienna concluded.

"Yes, there is." – Thant agreed. His look expressed much concern.

Professors McGonagall and Dumbledore exchanged also concerned looks. It was clear that something unusual was going on. But it was also clear that it had to do with the fact that Harry was the target, and as they came to think of it was the second Quidditch match where something happened to Harry.

The day before after the sudden end of the match, Harry left the locker heading to the broom shed to leave his broom. He had a lot to think about. They were about to win the match when this sudden sinister event took place though the strangest part was Draco's intervention. It made Harry wonder why he chose to help him and even when Harry heard the story he still had his doubts though he had to swallow his pride and thank the brat.

Ron and Alamar thought that it was no coincidence but his sisters and Hermione had disagreed since Quirrell was just as confused as the rest of the teachers. This made things complicated. He somehow had the feeling that another force had intervened. Maybe there was someone else that wanted to get rid of him. When he had voiced that idea the others rejected it without a second thought. But Harry was not so sure.

Harry reached the shed. He leaned against the wall and looked at Hogwarts with its windows glowing red on the setting sun. He remembered now the very concerned look on everyone especially on Snape's which was a bit unusual and...

And speaking of Snape...

A hooded figure came swiftly down the front steps of the castle. Clearly not wanting to be seen it headed straight to the forbidden forest. Harry recognized the figure's prowling walk – it was Snape.

Snape was sneaking out of the castle, while everyone was at dinner – what was going on?

Harry quickly mounted his broom flying silently over the castle. Snape entered the forest and Harry followed.

The trees were thick so Harry had to fly lower and lower till he heard voices. Harry landed silently in a towering beech tree.

Harry climbed carefully along the branches holding tight to his broomstick, trying to see through the leaves. Below him on a clearing stood Snape but he wasn't alone. Quirrell was there too and was stuttering worse than ever. Harry immobilized so to catch what they were saying.

"...d-don't know why you w-wanted t-t-to meet here-e of all p-places, S-Severus?"

"Oh, I thought we'd keep this private." – Snape replied with icy cold voice. "It's not for students to know about the Philosopher's stone."

Harry leaned forward as Quirrell obviously stutter something that he did not catch but which Snape interrupted.

"Have you found how to get past that three-headed dog of Hagrid's yet?"

"B-but s-Severus, I-I..."

"You don't want me as..." – Snape suddenly froze as there was a noise, which to his relief was only an owl's hooting.

"S-Severus, I-I d-don't know w-what you mean..."

"Oh, you do. You know perfectly what I mean."

"B-but..."

"We'll see no matter of your little hocus-pocus. I'll be waiting."

"B-but I d-don't..."

"Very well." – Snape cut in. "We'll have another little chat soon, when you think it over and decide where your loyalties lie."

"S-Severus, I..."

"Enough." – Snape bellowed. "I'll send for you when you had the time to think things over but don't take too long. I'm not that patient with..." – Snape did not finish his sentence as there was another, louder noise nearing them.

Snape and Quirrell strode away in different directions as quickly as possible while Harry remained still. The noise approached and Harry relaxed though he was utterly surprised as to what he saw.

Out of the bushes came out Cassie and Xsi. They looked as though they've been running away from something as they were breathing heavily. Harry remained hidden in the tree.

"Wow that was close, Loki." – Xsi said panting.

"Yeah." – Cassie agreed. "By Mortis, those things run quickly. Hopefully we lost them for good."

"Well, let's hope no one sees us here or we'll be in the world of trouble." – Xsi said.

"Yeah, wait!" – Cassie froze in her place as she saw two hooded figures heading to the castle. Cassie recognized one of the hooded figures and paled at once.

"Loki, what is it?" – Xsi asked seeing her sister.

"It's Snape. I've to get in the common room before he does." – Cassie said darting off.

Xsi only chuckled but her sister did not go far, as Harry had suddenly appeared before her still flying on his broom.

While they were talking he had taken off moving out of the tree and landing outside their sight so when Cassie approached he just climbed his broomstick and moved out of the shadowy ground.

"Nimbus!" – Cassie shrieked hopefully not very loud.

"Hello, Loki." – Harry said.

"Nimbus?" – Xsi came looking surprised to see him. "What are you...?"

"What were you two doing into the forest?" – Harry asked ignoring Xsi's question.

"Oh, nothing." – Cassie replied as innocently as possible.

"Oh, and those things that have chased you, are?"

"Nothing has chased as." – Xsi replied quickly.

"Really?" – Harry looked at them. "I was at the top branches when you two came out of the bushes so I heard everything you said."

Cassie and Xsi exchanged guilty looks.

"What were you doing into the forest?" – Harry repeated. "It's dangerous...come on, say something. You have no idea how lucky you were."

"Yeah, we know that. You weren't the one running away from a bunch of angry centaurs."

"What?" – Harry exclaimed. "Why were they angry?"

"Well, honestly I don't know. They mumbled something about wizards, unicorn's blood and the forest being theirs, and when we told them that the forest belongs to everyone they got angry – why – it beats me." – Xsi replied shrugging. "But anyway we plan to find out."

"Why?" – Harry asked. "What so interesting about it?"

"I don't know. It just sounds mysterious." "Yeah." – Cassie agreed then frowned. "Anyway, what were you doing here, Nimbus?"

"Taking my broomstick to the shed." – Harry replied at once, which was the truth, from a certain point of view.



"Really?" – Cassie narrowed her eyes. "And the shortest way to the shed passes by the forest?"

"I'll say, Loki, he's very lucky." – Xsi said laughing.

"Actually, you two are the lucky ones." – Harry countered seriously.

"Why?" – Cassie inquired.

"Well, it's because just a few moments ago, under this very tree stood Snape and Quirrell. And your quiet approach scared them off." – Harry replied.

"Aw." – Cassie said suddenly remembering. "The common room, I must get there before Snape." – And she ran away as quickly as possible.

"So Nimbus what were they doing here? And what were you doing here?" – Xsi asked.

Harry quickly told her what he had heard. Xsi listened without interrupting. When he finished she just frowned.

"Hmm. More mystery is adding to this Philosopher's Stone." – She said while they were flying back to the broom shed. "We'll have to convene the Capers."

"When?"

"In two three days, what say you?"

"It sounds fine. Good night, Trivia."

"Night, Nimbus!"

Harry headed back to the Gryffindor tower where everyone was still debating the sudden turn of events that led to the suspension of the Quidditch championship.

"Harry! Where have you been?" – Hermione squeaked.

"Never mind that now." – Harry said. "Let's find a quiet place; I have something to tell you."

They found quietness in Harry's room where he told them about Snape and Quirrell's meeting into the forest.

"So we were right, it is the Philosopher's Stone, and Snape's trying to see how far Quirrell has reached." – Hermione exclaimed.

"This is getting out of hand." – Harry observed. Ron and Hermione looked at him. "I mean with this debacle today. Are these events connected or are they separate?"

The other two did not reply for they knew not what to reply. They would have argued but even Hermione was beginning to ponder the same. Something was not adding up for this unforeseen complication has thrown everything into total disorder.

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

HarryHarry

## Chapter 13

### Growing Menace

The debacle of the past week did not repeat itself as Quidditch was suspended but the terror of it was not still forgotten, Harry however had, although most of it was directed at him. His now concerns were Draco's sudden change of behavior (he was dying to know why really he had helped him: for the story Draco had provided was not sufficient for him), the relationship of Snape and Quirrell and the Philosopher's stone, well plus exams, which as Hermione had pointed out were just ten weeks away.

And of course, the teachers were thinking like her. The Christmas holidays were much freer for now they were flooded with homework so the Easter holidays were not enjoyable at all. And anyway, it was difficult to relax when you have Hermione practicing wand moves or reciting the twelve uses of dragon blood. Moaning and yawning Harry and Ron stayed with Hermione during all their free time into the library trying to get through all their extra work.

"I'll never remember that." – Ron burst out one afternoon, throwing down his quill. He threw a longing look outside as it was a really fine day. The sky was clear, diamond blue, and there was a feeling of summer in the air.

Harry, who was looking up "Dittany" in One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi, didn't look up until he heard Ron say. "Hagrid, what are you doing into the library?"

"I'm lookin' for you three." – Hagrid replied. He looked worried and completely out of place here with his moleskin overcoat.

"For us?" – Hermione looked up.

"Yeah, you need ter come with me, right now."

"Hagrid, what's going on?" – Ron asked.

"Come." – Hagrid said.

They looked at each other but followed Hagrid who headed straight to the infirmary. As they entered, they saw two beds with drawn

curtains. They approached curiously. One of the curtains moved aside revealing a very pale looking Alamar.

"Hey, Harry, Ron, Hermione." – He barely whispered.

"Alamar, what's going on?" – Hermione asked.

"It's your sisters, Nimbus." – Alamar said turning to Harry.

"What?" – Harry exclaimed dashing to the beds where seeing his sisters turned white at once.

Hermione, Ron and Hagrid joined him. Cassie and Xsi looked asleep but their faces were very pale, almost white. Shivers were crossing their bodies from time to time.

"What happened?" – Harry asked barely holding his composure.

"I found them." – Hagrid said.

"Where?"

"In the forest. I was just doin' my routine check when I found them. They were lying on the ground, shiverin' like crazy. I brought them here at once." – Hagrid replied.

Ron had put an arm around Hermione who has gone pale and tears started pouring down her face.

"Ah, you are here, good." – Madam Pomfrey had come. "Their father will be here shortly."

"Thant? Where is he?" – Harry looked up.

"Lord Solmyr is with Professor Dumbledore." – Madam Pomfrey replied.

"What's with them?" – Harry inquired.

"To be honest, I'm not entirely sure." – Madam Pomfrey replied, frowning a bit. "I think they've suffered a great stress but what caused it – I have no idea. Come, leave them they need rest."

"I'm not leaving them." – Harry said stubbornly.

"But..."

"I'm staying." – Harry bellowed. "You'll have to take me out by force."

"Mr. Potter, be quiet. They need peace and tranquility but most of all rest."

"Whatever may be but I'm staying here." – Harry said firmly sitting beside Cassie's bed.

Madam Pomfrey did not look happy but there was nothing she could do. Hopefully, Dumbledore arrived soon followed by Lord Solmyr and Lady Saptienna.

"Ah, Headmaster." – Madam Pomfrey said. "The girls need rest and tranquility so could you take Mr. Potter off them."

"Why?" – Albus Dumbledore asked.

"He doesn't want to leave."

"Don't worry about it. I'll take care of it."

"Thank you, headmaster."

Meanwhile this conversation, Thant and Saptienna were near their children's beds. Thant looked closely at his girls. He touched them gently on the cheeks and frowned at once then turned around and asked.

"Who found them?"

"I did." – Hagrid replied.

"Where?"

"They were into the forest, very near the usual hunter path. They were shakin' when I found them. I took them at once ter the castle. How long have they bein' there I don't know though." – Hagrid explained.

Thant frowned. He gently touched their fronts with his fingers and started mumbling something in a strange language, which was indeed a bit creepy. The light in the infirmary went dimmer though it could have been just everyone's imagination.

"What are you doing?" – Madam Pomfrey shuddered. "Stop!"

Thant ignored her and continued his mumbling. Madam Pomfrey moved to stop him but Saptienna blocked her way.

"Do not interfere. These are our children. Stay away!" – Saptienna hissed menacingly.

Professor Dumbledore pulled Madam Pomfrey away before things could start to escalate further.

Thant stood up several minutes later looking very serious and stern. He looked at Saptienna then turned to Harry.

"Nimbus, they're going to be fine. Now, come with me."

"Sure, Thant." – Harry nodded slowly standing up.

"You three can come too." – Saptienna said turning to Ron, Hermione and Alamar.

"Madam Pomfrey, I'm grateful for the care you've taken for them. They need not to be disturbed by anyone, which means that if you have other patients, you will have to find a different room for them. And, oh, from time to time, only a few drops of ice cold water on their forehead, nothing more. They've passed through a great deal of dar...stress and need total silence and peace." – Thant said.

"I have prepared a potion that will help them out and..."

"Only a few drops of ice water on their foreheads will be more than sufficient." – Thant cut her off.

"With all due respect, sir, I'm the..."

"You know your things well, Madam Pomfrey, but I know my daughters better than you, so you'll do as I say." – Thant hissed. "They don't need potions or other medicines just icy water."

"But..." – Madam Pomfrey protested.

"Pomona, please do as Lord Solmyr desires." – Dumbledore interfered.

"But headmaster, they..."

"Pomona." – Dumbledore raised slightly his voice.

"Very well." – Madam Pomfrey sighed in defeat. "I hope you know what you're doing."

"I do." – Thant replied firmly, eyes flashing.

"This way, children." – Saptienna said.

The Capers followed Lady Saptienna out of the infirmary. Professor Dumbledore and Thant joined them. They headed outside to the lake. The sky was clear and the weather warm.

They sat near the lake on the fresh grass. Professor Dumbledore left them.

"What's wrong...I mean what has happened to them?" – Harry asked finally.

"The breath of Darkness." – Thant replied.

"The what?" – Hermione asked obviously not understanding. "Never heard of it."

"I'm not surprised because you won't find it in the books, dear." – Saptienna said. "Cassie and Xsi are sensitive to the threads of dark and light energy life forces. They have been since birth."

"They have undoubtedly been exposed to a thread of pure darkness, and a very powerful one." – Thant said. "Nothing else would be able to render them into this state."

"What state?" – Harry asked. "What's with them?"

"It is like falling into a deep and cold pit where the walls are of polished stone. It is a deep state of coma in a way of speaking. I had to call them back. Hopefully, they haven't been exposed for long or it may have been too late." – Thant explained, weary resting his head on Saptienna's shoulder.

"But how has it happen?"

"I don't know. They are the only ones that do. But I'll say that they've sensed a thread of pure darkness emanating from something or someone. Maybe this someone was passing by them or...I don't know." – Thant said tiredly.

"Calm down, dear." – Saptienna said gently caressing Thant. "They're going to be fine."

"I hope so." – Thant sighed. "Harry, you need to be very careful."

"Why?"

"Harry, this someone is possibly a dark wizard. And you have to avoid them because it is certainly sure for whom they had worked for."

"You mean Voldemort?" – Harry asked with fear while Ron flinched at the name.

"It is possible. But don't you worry, with Professor Dumbledore around no one will dare to touch you but extra caution is in order."

"I just want to know what they were doing in the forest in the first place." – Saptienna said.

"Well, we'll learn when they wake up."

"And when will they, sir?" – Alamar asked.

"I don't know, Alamar. I don't know." – Thant replied sighing heavily.

Thant and Saptienna left. The Capers remained till nightfall near Cassie and Xsi. Harry had the nagging feeling he knew why they were into the forest. It was something they've told him but what he just couldn't remember.



A week passed but still no change in Cassie and Xsi's condition. The Capers were passing by the infirmary every day to see them and change the flowers on the desk beside them.

It was in front of Potions in the dungeons that Harry suddenly remembered. He was talking to Hermione and Ron when Malfoy had interrupted as usual in his arrogant voice.

"Missing them..." – He had repeated. "Potter, you haven't fallen for the Ghouls?"

"Shut up, Malfoy." – Ron snapped.

"Oh, you too, Weasley." – Malfoy grinned. "Falling for the Ghouls? Maybe want to join the club of angry...?"

But before Ron could respond Harry suddenly exclaimed making Malfoy jump. "Genius as much as I hate to say it."

Malfoy looked dumbfounded at Harry who was so excited.

"Come." – Harry told Hermione and Ron.

"But Harry, Potions!" – Hermione protested.

"Come." – Harry insisted.

They reached for an empty classroom.

"Harry, what's going on?" – Hermione asked.

"I remember now."

"Remember what?"

"You remember the day I told you about Snape and Quirrell. Well, they ran away because Cassie and Xsi came from the forest. Well, Snape and Quirrell did not see them but anyway they told me that they ran away from some angry centaurs that were mumbling something about wizards and unicorn's blood. And Xsi told me then that they intend to find out what's all this about." – Harry explained.

"Unicorn's blood?" – Hermione exclaimed.

"Yeah, they've probably been back into the forest to look for clues when they must have encountered whatever it was that rendered them into the current condition." – Harry said.

"We have to tell Professor Dumbledore." – Hermione said.

"No!" – Harry firmly said. "We'll find out what it is all about."

"WHAT?" – Hermione shrieked.

"Capers forever." – Ron said though he was going just as pale as Hermione at this suggestion.

"But Harry..."

"NO – WE'LL!" – Harry cut her off. "We're going into the forest. And Hagrid will show us where he found them and we're going to ask him what exactly is guarding the stone."

"Well, Harry, I doubt Hagrid will do this." – Ron said.

"Oh, he will." – Harry said with adamant certainty.

Later in the evening, Harry, Ron and Hermione were under the cloak heading to Hagrid's hut. Right behind them a shadow was following them, well, it wasn't following them because it couldn't see them but was also going in the same direction.

They reached the hut and tapped on the door. They heard a clutter then Hagrid's sore voice asked while opening slightly the door.

"Who's there?"

Harry pulled off the cloak. "It's us."

"Blimey Harry, what yer doin' here?"

"We want to talk to you."

"It's too late. Come tomorrow."

Hagrid was about to close the door when the three said. "We know about the Philosopher's stone."

Hagrid paused at the door. "Oh, get in here."

"Wait!" – Another voice from the dark shadows called. It was Alamar.

"Alamar!" – Harry exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"Well, I came to...never mind. We are all here." – Alamar replied.

"Alright, get all in here." – Hagrid said.

They got in and Hagrid closed quickly the door behind them.

"So – yeh wanted ter ask me something?"

"Yes." – Harry said. "Actually, we want two things."

"Which are?"

"Well, one, I would like you to take us to the forest where you found Cassie and Xsi."

"Yeh want ter what?" – Hagrid asked shocked.

"You heard me."

"Why?"

"I want to know..." – Harry said. "...to know what they were doing there in the first place. I think it's important. They might have seen something."

"Harry, we don't know that." – Hermione said.

"Yes, we do. They were babbling something about unicorn's blood and wizards, and you heard Thant." – Harry said firmly.

At this Hagrid visibly turned pale, which did not go unnoticed.

"It seems Hagrid knows something about the unicorns, don't you?" – Alamar turned to Hagrid.

"Yeh gotta ter understand..." – Hagrid started mumbling.

"Hagrid, please, tell us." – Hermione pleaded.

"No! It's too dangerous." – Hagrid replied stubbornly.

"Well, doesn't matter." – Harry decided firmly. "We will go there without your help."

"Oh, no you won't." – Hagrid raised his voice.

"We will."

"Harry?" – Hermione interjected.

"What?" – Harry exclaimed a bit more belligerently than he wanted.

"We have another question, remember?" – Hermione reminded.

"Oh, yeah."

"Hagrid." – Alamar said diplomatically. "We were wondering if you could tell us what's guarding the Philosopher's stone."

Hagrid frowned at them.

"Oh, of course I can't." – Hagrid said. "One, I don't myself. Two, yeh know already too much, so I wouldn't tell yeh even if I could. That's Stone's here for a good reason. It got almost stolen from Gringotts. Beats me even how you know abou' Fluffy!"

"Oh, come one, Hagrid, you might not want to tell us but you do know, you know everything that's going on around here." – Hermione said in a warm, flattering voice. Hagrid's beard twitched and they could see he was smiling. "We only wondered who Dumbledore trusted enough to help him protect the Stone apart from you!"

Hagrid's chest swelled at these last words. The boys beamed at Hermione.

"Well, I don's'pose it could hurt ter tell yeh that...let's see...he borrowed Fluffy from me...then some o' the teachers did enchantments...Professor Sprout, Professor Flitwick, Professor McGonagall," – he ticked them off on his fingers. "Professor Quirrell an' Dumbledore himself did somethin' o' course. Hang on, I've forgotten one – oh, yeah, Professor Snape."

"Quirrell and Snape?" – They exclaimed then looked at each other. This certainly changed things.

"Yeah – yer not still on abou' that, are yeh? Look, Snape and Quirrell helped protect the Stone. They're not goin' ter steal it."

"So Hagrid," – Harry started after a while. "You'd be the only one who knows how to pass by Fluffy, right? And you wouldn't tell anyone? Not even one of the teachers?"

"Not a soul knows except Professor Dumbledore." – Hagrid answered proudly.

"Well, that's something." – Harry muttered to the others.

"Yeh want ter get back, it's late." – Hagrid said.

"Yeah, well, thanks, Hagrid." – Ron said.

"As I come ter think it, I'll accompany you ter the castle." – Hagrid said.

They had no choice but to follow Hagrid back to the castle. Harry decided to leave the visit to the forest for another day. As they reached the castle he noticed that he had not taken the cloak with him. He looked knowingly at Hermione.

"What?" – She whispered.

"The cloak!" – Harry replied.

"Where is it?"

"In the hut, I guess."

"Well, then don't worry."

"I leave yeh here. I trust you can find your way ter yer rooms." – Hagrid said as they reached the entrance.

They bid good-bye to Hagrid and ventured the double doors. They walked quietly and slowly. Now they were without the cloak so they had to be cautious not to run into a teacher or Flitch. They reached the staircases where they had to separate as Alamar was going in a different direction.

"Well good night, Alamar." – Harry wished.

Alamar had turned around but has frozen dead in his tracks.

"Alamar? What's the matter?" – Ron asked.

Alamar only pointed front of him then cleared his throat and whispered. "A...aa...well..."

The others turned around and froze as well. A lamp flared.

"Professor McGonagall." – Harry exclaimed understanding at once that they were in trouble now. She was in a tartan bathrobe and had a hair net.

"Good evening, Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, Mr. Weasley, Mr. Darkstone." – Her lips were white and thin. She had an icy look on her face.

As Harry knew, there wasn't a reason good enough that Professor McGonagall would accept for them being out of bed and creeping around the castle in the dead of the night.

"Follow me!"

They followed her to her cabinet. She sat behind her desk and looked at them.

"What were you all doing out of bed?" – She asked. "It's two o'clock in the morning. Explain yourselves!"

And even for the first time Hermione ever failed to answer a teacher's question. She was starring at her slippers, as still as a

statue. Professor McGonagall looked at them all but none bothered to answer – how could they.

"I'm very disappointed in you. Nothing gives a student the right to wander after hours around in the castle. All four of you will receive detention. Miss Granger, I thought you had more sense in you. And Potter, Weasley I thought that Gryffindor meant something to you, as well as Hufflepuff to you, Mr. Darkstone. It's dangerous to wander around these days. Fifty points will be taken..."

"Fifty?" – Harry exclaimed interrupting McGonagall – they would sink into forth place and without the victory that could have been theirs at the Quidditch match well, this was a disaster.

"Each!" – Professor McGonagall said firmly.

"Each?" – Ron exclaimed unbelievably. "For wandering around the castle? That's not fair."

"Would you like me to make them a hundred, Mr. Weasley?"

"No!" – Ron said quickly realizing he'd gone too far.

"Professor – please – " – Hermione pleaded.

"You can't..." – Harry tried to protest.

"Don't tell me what I can or can't do, Mr. Potter. "Now go back to bed, all of you!"

A hundred and fifty points lost in a single night. This did land Gryffindor at the bottom and Hufflepuff joined the third. Harry and the others felt bad about it – how could they ever make it up?

Harry didn't sleep this night and he knew that Ron hadn't slept either. Harry knew that there was nothing to comfort them for the loss of points. But they must not get sidetracked for they had to concentrate on finding out what happened to his sisters and the Philosopher's Stone.

In the morning, Gryffindors passing by the giant hourglasses that recorded the house points thought that there must be a mistake. How could they have a hundred and fifty points fewer than

yesterday? And then the story spread like fire: Harry Potter, the famous Potter and three of his friends, one being of Hufflepuff lost them all.

Slytherins and Ravenclaws on the other hand were clapping at them every time they passed by saying thing like: 'Thank you Potter, we owe you one!'

Ron had tried to encourage him.

"Don't mind them, Fred and George have lost loads of points all at once, and people still like them."

"Yeah, sure, but have they lost a hundred and fifty points in one go?"

"Well – no." – Ron admitted.

Harry knew that the damage was done and there was no time to repair it. In any other circumstances he would have sworn not to meddle into things that weren't his own business but he had to. His sisters were still in coma and he had to find out what was the connection. However, wandering and spying around the castle now proved to be close to impossible since he didn't have the cloak. It was still in Hagrid's hut. And he couldn't go there just like that. But Harry was not giving up. Actually he came up with an idea and a very crazy one.

"Harry, you know we can't go around. We don't have the cloak." – Ron tried to put some sense into him.

"Well, we'll have the cloak." – Harry said with confidence.

"How?"

"You'll see." – Harry said but revealed nothing of his plan. He did not want them to know, not just yet.

Anyway, the atmosphere in Hogwarts was becoming unbearable. Hermione and Ron were studying all together, staying late in the evening learning complex potions, charms and spells by heart. These were the only moments they kept off the pressure.



Harry on the other hand had other ideas when going to the library. He knew now who had protected the stone and was rummaging through the books trying to locate the possible defenses protecting the stone though he was looking for a needle in haystack of unknown size but this did not dampen his spirit at all.

For the past weeks he made no attempt to retrieve the cloak but that was because he was preoccupied with the library and his studies. But two weeks before exams he decided it is time to retrieve it. He needed the cloak for a night straw.

He stayed in the common room last under the pretext of studying. When Hermione and Ron finally went to bed, he made his move.

"Princess!" – He called into the air. There was a crack and Harry's personal house elf appeared.

"Master Harry!" – She squeaked bowing gently.

"Hey, Princess," – Harry said.

"How are Mistresses Cassie and Xsi?" – Princess asked.

"There has been no change." – Harry replied gloomily. "I'm starting to think that unless I find out whom they met and stop him or it they won't wake up."

"Oh," – Princess sighed sinking to the ground.

"Don't worry, I will find out but I need your help."

"Anything."

"Well, I haven't told that to Thant or Saptienna but I received for Christmas an invisibility cloak. Apparently it belonged to my birth father..."

"To your father, you meant?" – Princess gently corrected him.

"Yeah," – Harry smiled at the gentle reminder. Thant and Saptienna were his family but he mustn't ever forget who his real family was.

"So what can I do?"

"I forgot the cloak in Hagrid's hut and I haven't got the chance of retrieving it. Could you go and take it, please?"

"Of course, Master Harry." – Princess bowed and vanished.

Few minutes later, Princess reappeared and handed Harry his invisibility cloak.

"Anything else?" – Princess asked.

"No, thank you," – Harry was saying as another idea came to him.  
"Actually yes."

Princess was about to disappear but she turned around and waited patiently.

"I would like you to get here Kaiser and Casper."

Princess looked stunned at Harry. A frown appeared on her tiny face.  
"Why?"

"I need their help with something."

"Which is?"

"Something that only they can do. I don't want to put you in harm's way." – Harry said.

"I'll do anything you ask of me."

"I know but this could be dangerous and well they were much crazier than you in certain aspects and much more devilish." – Harry explained.

"Alright," – Princess agreed though rather downed.

"Don't worry, it's not something bad. I did not mean that you are not...a....you know."

"I understand. Boys' business." – Princess smiled and vanished with a crack.

"Well, no, that's not what I meant." – Harry said though to the air. "Here is what we should learn in school – how to talk to girls of any kind and species."

Harry did not have to wait long. There were two distinct cracks and the two 'crazy' house elves of the Solmyr family appeared. Harry had never seen them before and the one look he had at them he had to resist the sudden urge to burst into laughter.

Casper and Kaiser were dressed in a very odd manner. Casper was in a nightgown so pale and pearly white that one could easily confuse him with a ghost. Kaiser on the other hand was in military green attire that would make proud every general in the world. The shocking contrast between the two house elves was staggering.

"Master Harry had called for our assistance." – Kaiser said while bowing to the ground though as Harry noticed the two were looking also a bit apprehensive. They knew Master Thant had informed young master Harry of their mischief with the girls and it was logical to assume that Harry would not be happy about it. But Harry was not going to dwell on these matters.

"Yes, I have." – Harry put authority in his voice. His eyes were flashing. He had a job for them. "I want you to stick like shadows behind Professors Snape and Quirrell. I want to know what they are doing at every minute of every moment. I don't want you to be seen so you will have to be invisible. I don't want anyone in this castle or outside it to know that you are here. You will report only to me and no one else. And you will do that only when I'm alone wherever I might be. Is this perfectly clear?"

"Yes, Master Harry." – Kaiser and Casper said in unison and just as well bowing to the ground.

"Good," – Harry approved nodding his head. "Now go!"

The two elves bowed again and disappeared. Harry satisfied with the first part of his plan took the cloak, pulled it over him and strode off Gryffindor tower. He headed straight for the library. There was one thing that has been bothering him for a while and it was concerning unicorns.

He reached the library then Madame Pins' desk. He rummaged through it trying to locate something that would tell him where to look for everything connected to unicorns. He perfectly well knew that Pins was a perfectionist and it was logical to assume that she kept some sort of record on how the library was sorted. He located it soon enough and smiled.

Harry went into that section and took every book he found. He then spent almost the entire night going through the pages. We could safely say that he found a lot about unicorns and learnt that unicorn blood was the only ingredient never used by every day work. Unicorn blood as he read was a substance that could keep you alive even if you are on the fringe of death but on a terrible price – once your lips touch something so pure you would have a half life, a cursed life.

Harry sighed when he read this because a part of the puzzle was solved. Those silver spots they noticed on Quirrell had to be unicorn blood though this raised the question why Quirrell would need to drink it. He was not dying or in the state of dying then why. Something was not adding up.

As he was about to leave, Casper appeared startling him.

"I'm sorry if you startled you, Master Harry." – He apologized at once.

"You have something already?" – Harry asked stunned.

"Yes," – Casper replied. "Although it is not connected with the task you gave us."

Harry frowned. Casper noticed and continued.

"Kaiser and I had a little chat with Peeves and ..."

"Peeves?" – Harry interrupted stunned.

"Yes, Peeves, and he told us that every creature in the forest is well horrified. Every two weeks for the past few months something has been attacking unicorns. He said that it is probably a hooded creature that walks strangely. Then he also mentioned dark shadows that cross the forest. He did not elaborate on those

because it gives him shivers. He did however recall that on the day Mistresses Loki and Trivia ventured the forest these shadows had gone after a hooded figure or perhaps creature. So it is possible that these shadows were after the hooded figure and Mistresses Loki and Trivia scared them off or ..."

Harry silenced him with a wave of his hand. He did not have to continue. Another part of the puzzle came to place though it provided much confusion and concern for Harry. It seemed that he was right. There is another force involved and that force probably has nothing to do with the Philosopher's Stone. But then what was this force after? This was a question to which Harry had no answer.

"Did Peeves come to mention when these shadows choose to appear?" – Harry asked after pondering for a while.

"Well, he said somewhere around eleven twelve." – Casper replied.

"The ghostly hour, how cute." – Harry remarked.

"Master Harry, I hope you don't plan finding out." – Casper looked apprehensive and concerned.

"No, of course not, just curious." – Harry lied. Of course, he was planning to find out for these shadow things might be connected to what postponed Quidditch and the only chance his house had of winning the house cup (though that did not seem very important compared to the rest of the bad news).

Casper eyed his master but found no trace of lie for Harry had managed to control the feelings he was displaying. But the truth was that anger was swelling through him. He never had this feeling take control of him in that way. It was almost scary but his determination was adamant. This was not about the Quidditch. It was about the fact that someone had tried to kill him in a very sinister way and that this someone was probably also responsible for placing his sisters into coma. And he was determined to find out.

"You may go now." – Harry said.

"Of course, Master Harry." – Casper said while disappearing.

Harry returned the books and headed straight to Gryffindor common room. He hadn't slept all night but he was not tired either. His blunt determination was keeping him awake or should we say his anger.

He looked at the mirror piece in the common room and almost got scared at what he saw. There was no trace of the gentle and good hearted Harry Potter in there. The reflection he was seeing was that of Nimbus Solmyr, Prince of the Necromancers. His features were taut, his eyes were filled with cold fury, and his posture was commanding respect. For the first time in his life, Harry was displaying fully the attitude of a real Necromancer.

And his friends came to notice that drastic change in Harry. He was not laughing with them or doing anything the way he used to. Alamar got really concerned when he saw him on breakfast that day. He pulled Ron and Hermione aside and voiced his concern but they ignored him. However, in the afternoon, they came around to his point of view.

Friday came along and they had potions down in the dungeons. Draco and the rest of Slytherin were yet again thanking Ron, Hermione and Harry for placing them first in the House Cup competition. Ron and Hermione displayed their annoyance but Harry hardly took notice for his mind was preoccupied with other matters.

That day they had to make a very complex and annoying potion. Snape had given them the usual hour and half to complete it but Harry managed to stun them all when he finished half an hour earlier. Snape immediately went to check on Harry's potion and had to admit willy-nilly that he had gotten it right. Then as Ron was making a loud complaining when Snape made a rather sarcastic remark on the state of his potion Draco sneered in his usual manner. In this moment, Harry scolded him loudly, which stunned both Hermione and Ron but which also earned him the unbelieving twenty points. Draco became sober at once though he couldn't believe that Snape was awarding Potter for shutting him up.

The truth however was that even Snape has noticed the sudden change in Harry's behavior. There was something in this boy that shocked and even scared him. The shock came in two parts – first the time it took Harry to complete the task he gave the class for Snape was sure that Potter had used shortcuts to make the potion so quickly and the second part was that he acted in a total Slytherin

way. The scary part was linked to the look he gave Draco. Snape saw in that look something that gave him shivers. Draco undoubtedly had not noticed but he did so he awarded Potter to calm him down. And it seemed he had succeeded. The look in Harry's eyes had softened an inch.

After class, Harry headed straight to Gryffindor tower to take the invisibility cloak while the others went for lunch. Hermione and Ron the moment they noticed Harry was not with them also headed to the tower. But they did not find any trace of him. Ron got quickly up to their dormitory and returned real quick.

"He's taken the cloak." – He told Hermione.

"What is he up to?" – She pondered.

"I don't know." – Ron shrugged.

Both exchanged looks of concern but with no trace of Harry they headed back to the Great Hall hoping in their hearts that Harry was not going to do something he'd regret.

Harry had just put the cloak on him when his friends came into the common room. He remained still during their conversation and climbed through the hole when they exited the tower. He then headed down to the entrance using some of the shortcuts. On his way, he passed by an opened classroom door and froze in his tracks. He distinctly heard Quirrell's voice. He stepped on the threshold and saw something odd.

Quirrell was facing a mirror with his back. His turban was a bit uncoiled and he was stuttering.

"No – no, not again, please—"

It sounded as though someone was threatening him though Harry could not see anyone.

"All right, all right, I'll do it." – Quirrell sobbed.

But in this very moment a sharp pain crossed his scar, a pain he had never experienced and which brought him to his knees. Quirrell jumped to his feet looking apprehensively in the direction of the

sudden noise. But he couldn't see anything and Harry was making everything possible to not make even a sound, which was getting harder by the minute. He slowly managed to stand up and move out of the doorway. Quirrell approached carefully the spot Harry occupied just a few seconds ago. Then out of the blue, Quirrell muttered: 'Accio Cloak!'

But Harry's invisibility cloak did not move even a millimeter. Quirrell visibly relaxed and exited the room while straightening his turban leaving Harry very confused. What was Quirrell hiding? This question was starting to eat him. And where had this pain come from? Harry's mind calmed down and a possible answer came into it. Maybe, he was experiencing what Cassie and Xsi had. After all Thant was right Quirrell was a dark wizard serving another....his thought trailed off at once. Another one? But who else than the worst – Voldemort. Then everything became clear to him.

Quirrell was not after the stone for himself. He was after the stone for Voldemort. The stone produced the Elixir of Life, which makes its drinker immortal. And he has been drinking unicorn's blood to sustain Voldemort long enough so he could get hold of the stone. But there was one obstacle, well, actually two – one was how to get past Fluffy and the other was Dumbledore.

Hagrid would never tell anyone about Fluffy...at least not on purpose. But he did tell them about his existence and about who helped into the defenses of the stone. Probably Hagrid did not consider them a danger so what if Quirrell finds a way to make Hagrid believe the same thing for him, which was a scary thought.

Harry stepped out of the room and found another classroom well out of sight then took off the cloak.

"Casper, Kaiser." – He called. The two elves appeared at once. "Who of you has been following Quirrell?"

"I have." – Casper said.

"Has he been in the village pub lately? Let's say with Hagrid?"

"Yes, just yesterday, in Hog's head."

"What were they talking about?"



"Well, they talked about many things." – Casper answered diplomatically but quickly continued seeing Harry's expression. "They talked about the many duties Hagrid's has and the many creatures he takes care of. "

"Did the name Fluffy came in?"

Casper took a second to recall the conversation then nodded. "Yes, it did. Hagrid said that he had bought it from a Greek trader. And then after the sixth or seventh mug of wine, Hagrid said that the trick of handling every creature is to know how to calm them down. He said...'Play a bit of music and he goes straight to sleeping...' Yeah, something like that and then Hagrid said after Fluffy he wouldn't mind to have...."

"So he knows..." – Harry muttered.

"...a dragon. And..." – Casper stopped in mid sentence as he noticed that Master Harry was no longer in the room. "Where did he go?"

"Well, he went under a cloak and vanished out of sight." – Kaiser informed.

"You know we have to tell Master Thant about this."

"Oh, we can't." – Kaiser shook head. "He told us not to tell anyone."

"Well, we'll have to. We don't have a choice even if afterwards we'll have to..."

"Alright." – Kaiser sighed not happy with how this would go for them. "But for now we have to stick to our job of tailing those two." And the house elves vanished with a crack.

Harry ventured out of the room the moment he heard that Quirrell knows how to pass by Fluffy. He went straight to his room where he took out the wooden flute Hagrid had sent him for Christmas. He was to go for the stone when something outside attracted his attention.

He was not sure what he saw but he clearly remembered the conversation with Casper regarding the shadow things in the forest. His curiosity and anger won out. He headed to the forest besides Dumbledore was still here so even though Quirrell knows about Fluffy he wouldn't dare make a go for it.

Meanwhile, Ron and Hermione were just getting up from lunch when they received a note saying, 'Your detention will take place at eleven o'clock tonight. Meet Mr. Filch in the entrance hall.'

They had forgotten that they still had detentions to do in the furor over the points they lost so at eleven o'clock they went to the entrance hall. Alamar was already there as well as Filch who was carrying a lamp. But Harry was not and Filch did not fail to notice this.

"Where is Mr. Potter?" – He asked the three.

"We don't know." – Ron answered. "We haven't seen him since lunch."

"Well, he'll get what he deserves later. But for now, follow me." – Filch said and led into the direction of the forest. "I'll bet you'll think twice before breaking a school rule again? – He sneered leering at them. "It's too bad that they abandoned the old system – hang you by the wrists from the ceiling for a few days, I've still got the chains, ready in my office – just in case. Right, off you go, and don't think about running off or things will become even worse."

They marched off the dark grounds. Ron, Hermione and Alamar wondered for a moment what their punishment would be. It must be something terrible otherwise Filch wouldn't be gloating.

The moon has come out behind a cloud. Ahead they saw the lighted windows of Hagrid's hut then heard a loud shout.

"Is that you, Filch? Hurry up, I want ter get started."

The three visibly relaxed. They were probably going into the forest. Filch however had seen the expression on their face.

"I suppose you think you'll be enjoying yourself with that oaf, eh? Well think again, it's into the forest you're going and I'm much mistaken if you'll all come out in one piece."

"That's great." – Alamar replied defiantly.

Filtch stopped rooted on the spot and looked at Alamar. As far as he could see that boy was serious and looked more or less delighted they were going into the forest.

"Hurry up!" – Hagrid's voice brought Filtch out of his thoughts.

Hagrid came towards them, Fang on his heels. He was carrying his crossbow and a quiver of arrows on his shoulder.

"It's abou' time. I've bei' fer half an hour already. All right there yeh all..." – Hagrid stopped in mid sentence as he noticed Harry was not with the other three. "Where's Harry?"

"We don't know." – Hermione replied.

"Yeah, we haven't seen him since lunch." – Ron added.

Hagrid was visibly shocked.

"It doesn't matter, Hagrid." – Filtch sneered. "He'll get what he deserves later. Now these three have to be punished after all."

Hagrid still looked shocked but said. "'Is this why yer late, eh? Bin' lecturing them, eh? Yeh've yer bit; I'll take over from here."

"I'll be back at dawn." – Filtch said. "For what's left of them." He turned around and started back toward the castle, his lamp bobbing away into the darkness.

Hagrid turned to the three. "How is it that yer don't know where he is? We have ter inform someone."

"Well, maybe he forgot to come." – Ron said.

"Ron he doesn't know that detention is tonight." – Hermione objected.

"He would know if he had gone to our room. I left him a note." – Ron countered.

"Oh, how thoughtful." – Hermione remarked. Ron turned red.

"Well maybe he doesn't but can we stick to why we are here." – Alamar finished their banter. "Hagrid, we're going to look for the unicorns then, eh?"

The crossbow slipped from Hagrid's hand. He looked stunned at Alamar.

"Who told yer abou' it?"

"Come on, Hagrid. We talked abou' it in yer hut." – Alamar replied all smiling.

Hagrid shook his head. "It beats me how you children could know so much."

"It's not that difficult, Hagrid, after all. Right Ron?" – Alamar asked.

"Yep, it isn't." – Ron smiled then asked. "So are we?"

"Yes, we are." – Hagrid sighed in defeat. "Follow me!"

He led to the very edge of the forest where he stopped pointing at something silvery on the ground.

"Yeh see this – that's unicorn's blood." – Hagrid said. "This one is bin hurt badly by summat. This is the second time. I found one dead last Wednesday and another one the week before. Now, it's our job ter find the poor thing. We might have ter put it out of its misery so follow me!"

"The week before!" – Alamar exclaimed. "But..."

"You're right, Pluto." – Hermione agreed. "This should be around the time that..."

"What?" – Ron looked at them not understanding where they were going with this.

"Yeah, I agree." – Alamar said nodding. "But I wonder what the connection between them is?"

"We'll find out." – Hermione said firmly.

Hagrid held his lamp high and pointed at a narrow winding track that disappeared deep into the thick black trees. A light breeze lifted their hair as they into the forest.

As they walked they noticed that there was blood all over the path. Hagrid was holding the crossbow in front of him ready to strike at any time.

"Ah, Hagrid, what do you think killed the unicorn?" – Alamar asked as he saw that Hagrid's very worried and added. "Could it be a werewolf?"

"No, he's not fast enough." – Hagrid replied. "It's not easy ter catch a unicorn. They are powerful magical creatures. I never thought before one could get hurt."

They continued walking passing by a tree stump. They heard water running; there must be a stream somewhere close by. There were still spots of the silver blood on the ground and along the winding path.

"Yer all right?" – Hagrid turned to them. "Nothin' ter worry, it can't have gone far if it's that badly hurt, an' – GET BEHIND ME!"

Hagrid seized them hoisting them off the path behind him. He raised his crossbow ready to fire. Then they heard something slithering over the dead leaves nearby – it almost sounded like a cloak trailing along the ground. Hagrid squinted up the dark path but the sound faded away.

"I knew it." – Hagrid murmured. "Summat that doesn't belong in here."

"A werewolf?" – Alamar suggested.

"No, it wasn't – neither it's was a unicorn." – Hagrid replied frowning. "It beats me what it was. Right, now, follow me, but carefully."

They continued walking ears straining even for the faintest sound. Suddenly something definitely moved.

"Show yourself – I'm armed." – Hagrid shouted pointing the crossbow in the direction of the sound.

And into the clearing a man stepped out, but was it a man or a horse – that was difficult to tell at first. From the waist a man, with red hair and beard, but below was a horse's gleaming chestnut body with a long, reddish tail. Hagrid was visibly relieved.

"Ah, it's you Ronan. How are yeh?"

Hagrid walked forward and shook the centaur's hand.

"Good evening, Hagrid." – Ronan said. "Were you going to shoot me?"

"Can't be too careful. Summat in the forest is killin' unicorns. Yeh haven't happened ter see anythin' suspicious, have yeh?"

Ronan looked up to the sky and said. "Mars's shining brightly tonight."

"Yeah, but have yeh seen anythin' suspicious into the forest?"

Ronan looked at Hagrid but said nothing then he turned his gaze to the youngsters.

"Oh, this is Hermione, Ron and Alamar, they are students." – Hagrid quickly introduced them. "Ronan is a centaur."

"We noticed." – Hermione remarked.

"Good evening." – Ronan said. "Students, are you? And do you learn much at school?"

"Eh..."

"A bit." – Hermione said timidly.

"A bit, well that's something." – Ronan said flinging his head back to the sky.

A movement behind Ronan made Hagrid to lift his crossbow again but he quickly put it down as another centaur appeared. He was black-haired and bodied, and looked wilder than Ronan.

"Hullo Bane." – Hagrid greeted. "All right?"

"Good evening, Hagrid, you are well I hope?"

"Well, look, I've bin jus' askin' Ronan if he's anthin' odd into the forest. There's bin' a unicorn hurt badly. Yeh haven't seen anythin'?"

Bane also looked up at the sky. "The innocent are the first to fall. It has happened before it will happen again."

"Yes, but have yeh seen somethin'?" – Hagrid asked grumpily.

"Mars is bright tonight." – Bane said.

"Well, if you two see anythin' – yeh let me know. Good night."

They walked away leaving the centaurs. Hagrid was muttering something into his beard.

"Never try 'n get a straight answer from a centaur – damn stargazers. They're not interested into anythin' closer than the moon."

"Are there many of them here?" – Alamar asked.

"A fair few...keep themselves ter themselves mostly. They are very deep minded – they know things, jus' don't let on much."

They were going deeper into the forest. There wasn't a single sound besides the night noises of a sleeping forest. Soon they reached a crossroad.

"We've better separate." – Hagrid said. "All right, Ron and Alamar will go right, and Hermione will come with me. If anyone's in trouble send red sparks into the sky but if you find the unicorn send green sparks, right! Good, now let's move."

Ron and Alamar turned right and followed the path that was getting deeper into the dark forest. They walked for half an hour before it

became difficult to follow the path given the thickness of the surrounding trees. But it seemed that the unicorn's blood spots were getting thicker. There were splashes on the roots of the trees as though the poor creature had been thrashing around in pain. Alamar saw a clearing ahead through the branches of an ancient oak.

"Tyr, look!" – Alamar grabbed Ron by the arm stopping him.

Something white gleamed from the ground. They inched closer. It was the unicorn and it was dead.

They had never seen anything so beautiful and sad. Its legs were struck out at odd angles as it had crashed on the ground and its mane was spread pearly like on the dark leaves.

Alamar made a step forward when a slithering sound disturbed the silence around. A bush on the edge of the clearing quivered and a hooded figure came crawling. Alamar and Ron stood transfixed. The hooded figure bent down, lowering its head over the wound in the animal's side and started drinking its blood.

Alamar came to his senses and fired red sparks into the sky. The hood figure registered the sparks and lifted its head staring straight at them. Silver blood was pouring down its front. It got to its feet and came swiftly toward them. Ron and Alamar considered only for a moment what to do but their natural instinct gave them the right answer. They turned around to swiftly get lost, as the phrase goes.

Then they heard hooves behind them, galloping, and something jumped clean over them, charging at the figure. They turned around. There was no sign of the hooded figure but another centaur. He was neither Ronan nor Bane for this one looked younger. He had white blond hair and a palomino body.

"Are you all right?" – The centaur asked.

"Yeah, I think so." – Alamar replied. "What was that you saved us from?"

The centaur's astonishing blue eyes looked carefully at them. "You are students from the school?"



"Yes, we had to come in the forest with Hagrid as part of our punishment for breaking the rules in school." – Alamar recited quickly regaining his normal breathing after the unpleasant encounter with the hooded figure.

"The forest isn't safe at this time for anyone especially young siblings."

"Hagrid will come soon. I've sent him a signal." – Alamar said.

"What's your name?" – Ron asked.

"My name is Firenze. And you two have to get out of here. Can you ride?"

"We're honored but the question is should we?" – Alamar asked. "It did not seem to me that this is something a centaur would do." Alamar indeed did not know much about centaurs but something was telling him that they are not simple creatures.

Firenze smiled for he was touched by this sincere concern. But the forest had become very inhospitable and dangerous especially for small children human or otherwise. He lowered himself and said. "No, usually a centaur will not allow anyone to ride him but the circumstances are different. Now, climb on and hold tight though not too tight."

Then there was a sound of galloping and Ronan and Bane came out of the trees on the other side of the clearing.

"Firenze!" – Bane thundered. "What are you doing with two humans on your back? Are you a common mule?"

"No, I'm not." – Firenze answered. "But the forest is not safe for anyone anymore. These children have to leave and as you well know we don't harm siblings or let harm come to them."

Ronan nodded in agreement but Bane shot. "You know that we can't interfere. Have you not read what's to come in the stars?"

"I have but apparently you haven't." – Firenze replied fiercely.

"I'm sure he is acting for the best." – Ronan said in his gloomy voice.

"For best! What's that got to do with us? Centaurs are only concerned with what has been foretold! It's not our place to run after every human gone astray in our forest!"

Firenze backed in anger so Ron and Alamar had to hold on.

"Do you not see the dead unicorn?" – Firenze bellowed at Bane. "Do you not know why it was killed? Or have the stars not let you in on that secret? I set myself against what's lurking into our forest, Bane, yes, even if I have to be alongside the humans."

And Firenze whisked away, warned Alamar and Ron to keep their heads down in case of low branches, leaving Bane and Ronan behind them. They made their way through the trees in silence when Firenze suddenly stopped.

"Do you know what unicorn's blood is used for?"

"No." – Ron replied stunned at the sudden odd question.

"We usually use unicorn's horn and tail hair in Potions." – Alamar added.

"This is because it is a monstrous thing to slay a unicorn." – Firenze said. "Only one who has nothing to lose and everything to gain would resort to such a crime. The blood of unicorn will keep you alive even if you're an inch from death, but at a terrible price. The moment your lips touch the blood you will have a half life, a cursed life, for you have slain something so pure and defenseless only to save yourself."

Ron and Alamar looked at each other baffled by the answer.

"But who would be that desperate?" – Ron wondered aloud.

"Yeah." – Alamar agreed. "It would be much better to be dead!"

"True." – Firenze smiled. "Unless all you need is to stay alive just a little longer so you could take something else that would restore you to full power. Do you know what is hidden in the school in this very moment?"

Ron and Alamar stared at Firenze and then it hit them.

"The Philosopher's Stone." – They both blurted out. "The Elixir of Life but who would...?"

"Can you think of anybody that has waited long time to return to power, which was clung to life awaiting his chance to rise again?"

The truth hit them even faster. There was only one they could think of – the Dark Lord.

"Ron, Alamar! Are you two all right?"

Hermione and Hagrid were running towards them.

"We're fine." – Alamar said to calm her.

"Hagrid, the unicorn's dead. It's in that clearing over there." – Ron said.

"This is where I leave you." – Firenze murmured as Hagrid hurried off to examine the unicorn. "You're both safe now."

Ron and Alamar slid off his back.

"Good luck!" – Firenze said. "The planets have been read wrongly before. I hope this is one of these times."

He turned around and vanished into the depths of the forest leaving the two boys shivering in the cold.

"What happened?" – Hermione asked anxiously.

"We'll speak in the castle." – Alamar answered instead of Ron.

Hagrid returned shortly after and they were about to go back to the castle when a blood freezing shriek echoed in the forest. The sound of the shriek carried a familiar voice that drained all the blood from Hermione, Ron and Alamar's face.

"HARRY!" – They all shouted together and darted into the direction of the shriek. Hagrid followed them looking as white as a sheet.

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 14

Going for it!

Previously:

Hagrid returned shortly after and they were about to go back to the castle when a blood freezing shriek echoed in the forest. The sound of the shriek carried a familiar voice that drained all the blood from Hermione, Ron and Alamar's face.

"HARRY!" – They all shouted together and darted into the direction of the shriek. Hagrid followed them looking as white as a sheet.

Hermione, Ron and Alamar ran for ten or so minutes getting deeper into the forest and way out of the path. Hagrid was panting behind them holding up high his bow ready to strike.

"Wait for me!" – Hagrid called but the three ignored him. Harry's life was undoubtedly in danger so they cared for nothing else.

Another shriek pierced the thickness of the night silence. It was louder than the first and much scarier. The three picked up their pace, wands at the ready though they truly did not know what they could do. They've never really learnt anything this year that could help or prepare them for a combat situation but the little they knew they were going to apply hoping that it will be enough.

The forest's thickness thinned out into a glade where the light of the moon was providing enough for one to see clearly. And there at the far end was a small rock formation atop which barely stood Harry. His body was covered in deep wounds as though he had received numerous sword cuts. But his eyes were flashing, his wand slashing through the air producing eruptions of red flames. At the edges of the forest, just some distance away from him, stood three or maybe four figures in long dark robes. Their eyes were of gleaming red. And all around those figures, nets like the one that chased Harry on the Quidditch match were trying to make their way towards Harry.

Hermione, Ron and Alamar saw all this in a split of the second before directing their wands at the nets and the figures. The red orange jets of the spells illuminated the glade's edges. The figures in the robes noticed the new threat. But the increased flow of fiery

spells caught them unprepared. Some of the nets were sliced while the others were burnt. This angered the figures in the robes. Out of the blue more nets appeared spreading fear and doubt before them but the arrival of Hagrid and unknowingly from where of three centaurs shifted the balance. The nets gathered around the figures and they vanished suddenly into the thickness of the night.

"HARRY!" – Hermione shouted running towards him.

On the rocky formation, Harry was laying unconscious drained of all his strength that had kept him up. He fell just as soon as his friends joined the battle and altered the course of the nets.

"HARRY!" – Ron and Alamar called as they reached him panting after Hermione who was already crouching beside him. She was holding her hands over his many wounds trying to stop the bleeding.

Hagrid reached the formation. He was as white as a sheet and going whither.

The three centaurs that had come to the glade were no other than Ronan, Bane and Firenze. There was no sign of their previous arrogance and annoyance of others interfering into centaur's business.

"We have to take the boy to the castle." – Firenze said.

"I agree." – Bane nodded stunning Ronan, Firenze and the others. "The forest is not safe any longer especially for the Potter boy though I wonder what he was doing here in the first place."

"Who's going to take him?" – Ronan asked in his usual gloomy voice.

"I will carry him." – Bane replied again stunning the others with his answer. But he paid no attention to it. He gently took Harry off the rocky ground. "Ronan, you will go and alert the others of this new threat in our forest. Firenze, you will help me in carrying the Potter's boy friends."

This unusual offer and behavior of Bane's was hard to explain but no one complained.

"I will take only one with me to keep the Potter boy steady on my back." – Bane said and Ron volunteered as he had already ridden on the back of a centaur. Ron and Bane rode away while Firenze took on Hermione and Alamar.

The ride home did not take long. Bane galloped fast while selecting carefully his way through the forest so to ease the ride for the ones he carried. He was not very fond of the idea of carrying humans on his back but Firenze was right. The forest was not safe for these Hogwarts students especially Potter. The uncommon bravery of this boy was something new for him. He could hardly imagine what had drawn the boy here and why. Firenze had said that the stars were predicting something sinister and unusual apart of the upcoming war. And this something managed to happen quite quickly and this was being one of the reasons why Bane deviated from his usual response to such situations.

Bane reached the front door of Hogwarts and pushed it open. He then galloped to the infirmary. You can imagine the surprise on Madame Pomfrey's face when she saw Bane standing before her. But she got over it when Ron jumped off carrying the very pale and bloody Harry in his hands.

"Oh, my God!" – Madame Pomfrey exclaimed. She quickly took Harry off Ron's hands and carried him inside.

"I take my leave now." – Bane informed.

"Thank you!" – Ron said turning to the centaur.

"Keep him safe." – Bane said and with that he strode away.

Ron ventured into the infirmary. Madame Pomfrey had placed Harry on a bed and was bent over him muttering some incantations. Some of the wounds began to close but others remained open continuing to bleed. Ron was shocked to see how many the wounds really were and began to wonder how Harry had survived for so long.

A few minutes later, the doors of the infirmary burst open and Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall came in both looking pale and concerned.

"Pomona how is he?" – Minerva asked.

"I have closed some of the most dangerous wounds but there are others that are still bleeding and there's nothing I can do to stop them." – Madame Pomfrey explained looking already exhausted.

"Let me see." – Professor Dumbledore said and bent over Harry. He probably used the same healing spells as Madame Pomfrey did and when they did not take any effect he began muttering in some unknown language. For a moment, it looked like Professor Dumbledore had succeed but it lasted only a moment. Dumbledore frowned and tried again but with the same result. "We have to transfer him into St Mungo's."

"I'll arrange it." – Madame Pomfrey said and darted off.

"What has happened to him?" – McGonagall turned to Ron and he recounted the events just as Hermione and Alamar came in. They added a few things here and there but for some undefined reason omitted the real reasons. They were determined to reach the bottom of the mystery and this event had only just hardened their will.

Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall listened inventively. They both frowned for the story they heard was deeply disturbing.

"Minerva, inform the Solmyrs of the situation while I see Harry to St Mungo." – Dumbledore said.

"Can we come too?" – Alamar asked though he knew the answer.

Dumbledore looked at them but smiled. "You will be able to visit him afterwards. I'll let you know when that is."

"Alright," – Ron sighed but he looked at Alamar and Hermione knowingly, which attracted Dumbledore's attention. He had clearly sensed that the three had not told him everything.

"Is there something you three want to tell me?" – Dumbledore asked suddenly.

The three exchanged looks and all together shook heads. "No, sir, nothing."



"Very well," – Dumbledore said though he was sure of the exact opposite now. "Off you go, back to your dormitories." Then he took Harry, carrying him out of the infirmary ward.

Ron looked at Alamar and Hermione and said. "Let's find a quiet place."

"What's wrong with where we are?" – Alamar asked.

"Ron's right," – Hermione supported Ron. "Here, the walls are certain to have ears. Let's go!"

The three found an empty classroom on the far end of the Astronomy tower where they knew for a fact that no one goes to. There the boys told Hermione what really had happened into the forest while they were only with Firenze (for they had told the story from a different angle to Dumbledore and McGonagall).

Hermione did not speak for a while but then snapped her fingers. "Of course." She said.

"What?" – Ron asked.

"This makes perfect sense now."

"What makes?"

"Harry was right all along though I wonder whether he had managed to put everything together." – Hermione continued ignoring Ron completely but remembered the other two and explained. "Quirrell is not after the stone for himself but rather for You-Know-Who that is why he had silver spots on his face. He was drinking unicorn blood for You-Know-Who all along. And now all he needs is the Philosopher's Stone to come back to power and restart his reign of terror."

"Yes," – Alamar exclaimed finally understanding how everything fitted in. "And all that is left are two obstacles – Dumbledore and Fluffy."

"But he doesn't know how to get pass him." – Ron reminded.

"Yes, indeed...." – Alamar's voice trailed while suddenly realizing something. "But that's not entirely true."

Hermione and Ron looked at him not understanding where he was going.

"It is as you said Tyr. Hagrid will never tell a soul besides Dumbledore but he did tell us about Nicolas Flamel because he..."

"He did not consider us a threat to the stone's security." – Hermione continued his trail of thoughts. "He even told us who has helped in protecting the stone."

"After you coerced him to." – Alamar added with a smile.

"Well," – Hermione smiled guiltily. "I asked him nicely."

"But you are right he did tell us nonetheless so what if..." – Alamar said carefully choosing his next words. "What if he told someone else that he did not consider a threat?"

"And that someone being Quirrell in disguise." – Ron added up remembering the conversation with Hagrid when he told them about Fluffy. "He said he was in that pub what's its name, well whatever and..."

"Right." – Alamar exclaimed. "So that leaves Dumbledore."

"Yeah," – Ron nodded.

"What are we going to do?" – Hermione voiced the very thing the other two were thinking about. "Shouldn't we tell professor Dumbledore?"

"No." – Alamar said firmly. "We are going for it!"

"Pluto, that's what Harry said and see what, happened." – Hermione protested. "Besides, we don't know enough to face neither Quirrell nor You-Know-Who."

"Well, we have time to learn. Besides, I just got a very crazy idea." – Alamar said.

"Like what?"

"We'll take Malfoy with us."

"Are you insane?" – Ron exclaimed shocked. "He's going to join Quirrell and You-Know-Who without a second thought."

"No, Alamar is right." – Hermione said stunning Ron even further but she shook quickly her head. "Not about taking Malfoy with us but we will need some help. I was thinking more in the lines of your brothers Ron."

"Well, they might agree." – Ron said visibly relieved.

"But first we must find as much as we can about the possible defensive enchantments the others teachers might have placed." – Hermione said.

"Agreed." – The other two nodded, and Alamar added. "First thing tomorrow, we go to the library and get to work."

The three agreed and headed out. Hermione and Ron went back to Gryffindor tower while Alamar headed to Hufflepuff.

The next day, the whole school knew that Harry had been attacked and blessed into the forest and that he had been transferred to St Mungo's. Gryffindors quickly forgave Harry and his friends for losing points to Gryffindor. They were all concerned but the stories that flew around all sounded horrifying though incredibly inaccurate. Everyone was stalking Hermione and Ron for details but they kept to the official story as Dumbledore had warned them.

Lord Solmyr and Lady Saptienna had gone straight to London in St Mungo to see Harry after Dumbledore left him in the healers' hands. They were naturally distressed that in the window of a few weeks their children and Harry were both attacked and blessed. They of course expressed fully their concern and anger. Thant was starting to consider removing his children from Hogwarts permanently. The dangers were starting to grow like weeds in a garden. But this was only a thought born out of helplessness. He though promised himself that someone is going to pay for all this someday.

Professor Dumbledore had then returned to Hogwarts. He had Hermione, Ron and Alamar called to him. He instructed them what to say in front of the other students. He did not want to create unfounded panic among the student body.

In the next few days, Hermione, Ron and Alamar spent all their time into library researching what incantations the other teachers might have placed to protect the stone. They were determined to reach to the bottom of the known mystery. They wanted to find the stone before Quirrell. And they had time for that as Dumbledore was still in the castle and they perfectly well knew that Quirrell was not going to make his move before that obstacle was gone. But they also had one problem – they couldn't find how to get pass Fluffy.

Then the day before exams, as they were returning from the library, they saw Peeves floating in the air throwing pieces of chalk at Mrs. Norris and the very maddened Filch cackling in his usual sing like voice. Hermione stopped rooted on the spot. The other two eyed her.

"Hermione, what's the matter?" – Ron asked.

"Let's go." – She said suddenly snapping out. She found the closest room and shut the door behind them. "I finally got it."

"Got what?" – Alamar inquired perplexed.

"I just remembered something." – Hermione slashed her hand through the air happily. "It was something so small that it almost got unnoticed. But now I know."

"Would you be so kind to share it with us?" – Ron asked.

"When Snape, Quirrell and McGonagall found us in the girls' lavatory with the troll, Harry said that Snape's leg was bleeding. We reasoned it was because he had tried to pass by Fluffy but got bitten, right?"

"Yeah, so?"

"But then we went to check on what's on the third floor and found ourselves face to face with Fluffy, right?"

"Yes," – Alamar said. "Hermione, where are you going with this?"

"Fluffy did not attack us the moment we stepped in. Why?"

Ron and Alamar exchanged looks shrugging.

"It did not attack us because something was distracting it and that something happened to be Peeves' sing like voice." – Hermione said with a victory smile on her face.

Ron and Alamar looked at each other again and then it hit them. Of course, it was so simple. Then Ron remembered one of Harry's gifts for Christmas. It was a wooden flute sent to him by Hagrid. So he did tell them though quite indirectly.

"Harry's got a wooden flute for Christmas from Hagrid." – Ron said.

"So Hagrid has helped us without us realizing it?" – Alamar exclaimed and not waiting for an answer continued. "Alright, we have everything now."

"Yes, but for a small detail. We need Fred and George." – Hermione reminded.

"Indeed." – Alamar agreed.

"Well, let's go get them." – Ron said.

"I can't come with you." – Alamar said.

"Why not?"

"Well, it will be because I have no right to be in Gryffindor's Common Room."

"Oh, right." – Ron nodded.

"Doesn't matter. Wait for us outside. We won't be long." – Hermione said.

Hermione and Ron went straight into the Common Room where all the Gryffindors were studying. They located quickly Fred and George and asked them to come along. Fred and George looked at each other perplexed but followed nonetheless. Outside they found

Alamar and headed again to an abandoned classroom. There they told the twins what they were up to. Fred and George looked a long time at them without saying a word as they were shocked to a never before seen degree.

"Well?" – Ron asked his brothers as he was starting to lose patience.

But truth to be said, Fred and George have never considered the possibility to be outdone by their little brother and his friends in anything regarding the prankster business. And what these three wanted of them was just that – total disregard of the school rules not to mention that it was probably going to be very dangerous.

"Count us in." – Fred said finally snapping out of the shock. "But are you sure you know how to pass by that three headed dog?"

"Yes, we do." – Hermione confirmed.

"So when is the prank happening?" – George inquired.

"Tomorrow night," – The three exclaimed together.

"Alright, then at twelve in the common room and..."

"Midnight before the third floor's door." – Alamar corrected him.

The twins left. Ron then voiced a concern. "How are we going to reach the third floor without anyone seeing us? Not to mention that Dumbledore is still here."

"It doesn't matter whether Dumbledore is here or not." – Alamar said. "We have to get to the stone first."

"Still, we can't avoid everyone." – Ron continued then added. "If we had the cloak it would be much easier."

"I know but we don't. Only Harry knows where it is." – Alamar observed. "I did not see it with him when we found him in the forest."

"Neither did I." – Hermione said. "But Ron's right."

"Well, Tyr, you claimed that your brothers know the school inside out. It's time we found out whether it's true or not." – Alamar casually mentioned.

"You're right." – Ron exclaimed. "Brilliant, Pluto."

"Alright, see you tomorrow, you know where." – Alamar said.

"It would be best if we don't ..." – Hermione was saying.

"Right," – Alamar and Ron nodded understanding perfectly what she meant. There was no point to tick anyone to what they were up to.

The next day, they could hardly wait for midnight to come. The exams passed smoothly though all three of them were quite stressed. As the exams finished, Professor McGonagall called them in her office.

"I wanted to inform you that Harry Potter is out of danger. The healers of St Mungo managed to stabilize him although he's still unconscious. Professor Dumbledore is gone to see him today."

"He's gone?" – The three blurted out.

"Yes, Professor Dumbledore wanted to make sure he's well."

"Aren't Lord Solmyr and Lady Saptienna there too?" – Hermione asked trying to keep her voice steady.

"Yes, of course, they are." – McGonagall said. "But Harry's in Professor Dumbledore's care too besides he has business in London as well."

"What business?" – Ron inquired.

"Mr. Weasley, Professor Dumbledore is a great and important wizard and he has his demands."

"Of course, he does." – Hermione cut in throwing a warning look at Ron who understood at once. This did not go unnoticed by McGonagall though she could not possibly interpret it.

"Well, off you go." – McGonagall said after eyeing them for a while.

"Wow that was close." – Alamar exclaimed. "Tyr, couldn't you keep it quiet?"

"Well, probably but don't you realize what that means?" – Ron asked. "Dumbledore's gone to London, which means..."

"That Quirrell is going to make a go for the stone," – Hermione finished his sentence. "Yes, we know."

"Probably tonight, just like us." – Alamar suggested.

"Yeah, probably." – Hermione nodded. "But this changes nothing either. We will be going too and hopefully we could get first to the st...."

"Shush." – Ron interrupted her. They were passing by other students among which some Gryffindors. "Keep it quiet." Hermione understood and the three did not say another word. They separated on the marble staircase, each heading back to their common room.

At eleven and a half, Ron descended down the stairs. Hermione was just coming down as well as the twins. They were about to leave for the portrait hole when they noticed a frog jump from an armchair.

"Trevor, you shouldn't be here." – Ron whispered.

"Neither should you." – A voice came out of the armchair. It was Neville. "You are going out again, aren't you?"

"Neville now is not the time." – Ron said.

"I won't let you. You will get Gryffindor in trouble again." – Neville said as he was visibly gathering up strength.

"Neville, get out of our way." – Ron snapped. "We have to go."

"I won't let you." – Neville said firmly. "I'll fight you."

"Don't be an idiot." – Ron shot.

"I'm not an idiot. You are the one that told me to stand up to people."



"Yes, but not to us. Neville, look, we really have to go."

But Neville did not back down. He raised his fists clearly ready to fight them if necessary.

"Hermione, do something." – Ron said desperately.

"I'm really, really sorry about this Neville." – She said and raising her wand she muttered: "Petrificus Totalus." Neville's body became stiff at once and with a thud he fell down like a plank. "It's the full body bind curse." Hermione explained to the others.

"Brilliant." – Fred exclaimed.

"Let's move or we'll be late." – George reminded.

With Fred and George's help they reached the third floor without any incidents. There before the door Alamar stood waiting for them.

"No problems, I trust?" – He whispered.

"Well, one small one but Hermione took care of it." – Ron replied and added up. "I'll tell you later."

"Alright, then are we ready?" – Fred asked. Everyone nodded. "Let's go then."

"Alohomora." – Hermione whispered and the door opened.

It became clear that Quirrell had been already here as the Cerberus was sleeping. There was a harp delivering gentle tones from the corner of the room.

"Great, Quirrell is already down the trap door." – Ron observed angrily.

"Doesn't matter; let's move the Cerberus paw away from the trap door." – Alamar said.

Fred, George, Ron and Alamar moved forward, reached the giant paw and pushed it aside as gently as possible.

Okay. This is done." – Alamar said panting. "Who's going first?"

"Well..." – Hermione paused at once suddenly noticing the thick silence as well as the building growling of Fluffy. The harp had stopped playing. "Ron, the flute."

Ron did not wait to be asked twice. He took out the flute and passed it quickly to Hermione who began playing at once. It was not a real tune but it was working.

"I'll be going first." – George took the lead. "When I give you the ok signal you can follow."

He descended slowly, gripping the edge of the trapdoor, until he was hanging on his hands into the dark void.

"Here, I go." – He said while letting go.

George felt like he was falling several hundred meters. Then at last he hit the ground – FLUMP – but it was not something tough. It was rather softer than he expected. He looked up and shouted. "It's ok. Come on."

A minute later, he heard another thump near him, and the growling of Alamar, then the one of Fred and Ron. Hermione landed last judging by the infernal barking of Fluffy.

"Wow." – Ron exclaimed. "It was good that we landed on this cushioned ground."

"Not really." – Hermione said while reaching solid ground, though it seemed she'd done it in slow motion.

"Why?" – Ron asked bewildered.

"Well, look at yourselves." – Hermione pointed at their legs.

It was now that they noticed they had landed into a plant like floor. Unfortunately, Hermione was right. They were no longer free. As they were admiring their miraculous survival of the hundred meters fall, the plant had entangled their feet.

Logically the four boys tried at once to get free but the more they were moving the worst it was getting. The plant was entangling them further until they could barely move.

"Stop struggling." – Hermione told them not that it had any effect. "I know what this is."

"Oh, really, how helpful." – Ron blurted out angrily struggling even more to get free of the possessing plant.

"This is Devil's Snare, the more you struggle the worst it's going to get. I've read about it in Herbology." – Hermione explained in her usual tone of supremacy.

"Great." – Ron panted, gasping for air.

"Anything helpful about it?" – Alamar said with difficulty.

"I'm trying to remember." – Hermione snapped. "Devil's Snare, Devil's Snare...what did Professor Sprout say? – It likes dark and damp..."

"So light a fire." – Alamar choked.

"Yes, of course, but there's no wood." – Hermione cried, wringing her hands.

"HAVE YOU GONE MAD?" – Ron bellowed. "ARE YOU A WITCH OR NOT?"

"Oh, right." – Hermione said, and she whipped out her wand, waved it, and muttered something, and sent a jet of bluebell flames at the plant. In a matter of seconds, the four boys felt the plant's grip loosening up as it cringed away from the warmth and the light. Wriggling and flailing, it unraveled itself from their bodies, and then they were able to pull free.

"Luckily, Hermione pays attention in Herbology." – Fred observed.

"Actually, luckily, Alamar doesn't lose his cool." – George corrected him.

"Yeah, " – Ron agreed. "There's no wood – honestly..."

"This way!" – Alamar said and led the group down the stone passage way, which happened to be the only way available.

All they could hear besides their footsteps was the gentle drip of water trickling down the walls.

"Can you hear something?" – Hermione asked as they reached an archway.

They listened. There was the distinct but soft sound of rustling and clinging.

"You don't think this would be a ghost?" – Ron whispered.

"Doubtful." – Alamar said.

They ventured into the next room. The clinging noise was made by small jewel-bright birds flying high in the arching ceiling above them. On the opposite side, there was a heavy wooden door.

"Do you think they'll attack if we pass?" – Ron asked looking at the birds.

"Probably." – Alamar said. "Well, there's only one way to know. I'll run."

Alamar passed across the room covering his face with his arms but the birds did not attack. He tried then opening the door with the opening incantation but the door did not bulge.

"Damn, well, it was worth to try." – He observed.

"That doesn't help us much." – Ron remarked. "How are we going to open the door?"

"With a key, silly." – Fred said.

"A key?"

"Yes, those are not birds. They are keys." – George pointed. As the others looked more closely they came to agree.

"So now what?"

"Isn't it obvious?" – Fred exclaimed grinning. "We have to catch the key."

"Yeah, Alamar, check what we are looking for." – George demanded.

Alamar and Ron took a look at the key hole. "I think we are looking for an old rusty one." Ron announced.

"Alright, George, let's grab a broom." – Fred said taking one of the brooms on the far side of the room. "Ah, Alamar, Ron, we could use your help. Once we locate the key, we will have to trap it so George can grab it."

The four took off and found themselves among the flying keys. It was Fred that spotted first the key after half an hour of flight. "I see it. It is this one with the crumpled blue wings. Alright take your positions. And now..."

Fred, Alamar and Ron closed on the keys. The crumpled key tried to escape them but fell right in the hands of George. However, the moment he caught the key all the keys started attacking him, stinging him like a flock of angry bees.

"George," – Fred called. "Pass the key to Hermione."

George dived in, the flock of keys after him and passed the key to Hermione. She grabbed it, ran to the door, rammed it into the keyhole and turned. The door opened at once.

Hermione then pushed the door open and the four boys flew in. She then swiftly closed the door where the hundreds of keys pinned into the wood with a loud thump.

They looked around. The chamber they were into was so dark they couldn't see anything at all. But as they advanced light suddenly flooded the room to reveal an astonishing sight.

They were standing on the edge of a huge chessboard, behind the black chessmen, which were way taller than they were and carved in what appeared to be black stone. Facing them across the board

were the white pieces, and just behind them another door. They shivered as the white pieces had no faces.

But they passed by the black figures, reaching the middle of the chessboard. They were to continue pass the pawns if they had not come to life blocking their way with their sharp swords. The youngsters stepped backwards.

"Now what?" – Hermione exclaimed.

"It's obvious, isn't it?" – Ron said. "We've got to play our way through the board."

"How?" – Hermione said nervously.

"I think we'll have to be chessmen." – Ron said.

He walked to one of the black knights and touched him. The moment he did the figure sprang to life. The horse pawed the ground while the knight turned his head down to Ron.

"Do we...er...have to join you to get across?" – The black knight nodded. Ron turned to the other four.

"This needs thinking about..." – He said. "Now, don't get offended but neither of you is as good as me, even you Pluto."

"No one is offended," – Hermione said quickly before Pluto could retort. "Just tell us what to do."

"Well, Fred is going to take the place of the king and Hermione of the queen," – Ron started pointing out. The figures in question were obviously listening as they made place for Hermione and Fred. "Now, Alamar, you're going to take the place of that bishop and George of the castle next to him while I'll be a knight."

The other figures moved out leaving the space for Ron, George and Alamar.

"White always moves first." – Ron said, peering across the board. "Yes, look."

"A, Ron, you don't suppose..." – Hermione's voice trailed off. "This is going to be like real wizard chess."

Ron did not answer at first than commanded a pawn. "You there, one square ahead."

The pawn moved forward. The white one responded immediately. It took out its swords and crashed the poor black one. Fumes erupted with sinister hissing. Ron swallowed.

"Yes, Hermione, I'm afraid this is going to be exactly like wizard chess."

Ron started directing the black pieces. A thought crossed Hermione's head – what if they lost – then what they were going to do.

"Right, George, move diagonally four squares to the right."

Their first real shock was when they lost their other knight. The white queen smashed him to the ground and dragged him off board.

"Had to let this happen." – Ron said, looking shaken. "This leaves you free to take this bishop, Hermione, go on."

Every time they lost a piece the white ones showed no mercy. Soon there was a pile of black pieces along the wall with their faces down. Twice, Ron saw just in time that George and Hermione were in danger. He himself darted around the board taking just as much pieces as they've lost.

"Now, we're nearly there." – He said thoughtfully. "Yeah, there is no other way...I have to be taken."

"No." – Hermione shouted.

"That's chess." – Ron snapped. "Sacrifices must be made in order to win. "I'll let the queen to take me, and then George you will be clear to checkmate the king."

Pluto also looked at Ron's strategy but saw a flaw.

"No, Ron." – He also shouted.

"Yes, Pluto." – Ron shouted back.

"No, you do not see. Look on B4. If you let yourself to be taken and George moves to checkmate the king, the white castle will take him." – Alamar explained.

Ron looked again and bit his lip, Alamar was right. But then what to do?

"Any suggestions?"

Alamar did not reply. He was scanning the board looking for a way. Suddenly he whimpered, "Yeah, it's the only way," – he thought.

"Ron, I'll move four squares to the left, then you'll take the castle that will take me thus forcing the queen to take you, and then Hermione can move one square forward thus forcing the white to turn their attention to her while clearing the path for George to checkmate the king." – Alamar explained.

Ron followed Alamar's logic and nodded in agreement.

"Yeah, it has to be this way. Good thinking there Alamar."

"Is there another way?" – Hermione asked though not following their pattern of thought. She was after all a girl trying to think about everyone's safety.

"No, Athena, I'm afraid not." – Alamar shook head. "Ready?" – Alamar called, his face drawn of color but determined. "Here, I go."

It happened as Alamar said. He was taken and then Ron. They were both knocked out but that cleared the way and George checkmated the King who took off his crown and threw in George's feet. The chessmen parted bowing, leaving the door ahead clear. With one desperate look at Alamar and Ron; Hermione, Fred and George charged through the door and up the next passageway.

"Do you think they'll be alright?" – Hermione asked her heart racing.



"I think so yes." – Fred nodded and then froze in his tracks. The three were facing a twelve feet tall mountain troll. The stench was unbearable.

George regained his composure at once. There was no time to waste. He turned to Hermione. "We'll distract that thing while you go on."

"What? No..."

"Hermione, go and don't argue." – George cut her off.

"Ready?" – Fred asked turning to his brother who simply nodded. They drew wands firing spells into the wall left of the troll. The troll instinctively turned into the direction of the disturbance thus leaving a big enough gap for Hermione to reach the door on the other side.

"Go!" – Both twins shouted. "It will be distracted only for as much."

"What about you? How are you going to deal with it?"

"Hermione, don't waste time." – George interrupted her again and pushed her forwards while he and Fred advanced on the troll.

Hermione in any other circumstance would have protested but not in this one for George was right – she won't get another chance or time or even strength to cross. She ran across as quickly as possible and right through the door. The last thing Hermione saw was the enraged troll and the spells both the twins were firing at it.

The moment Hermione crossed through the threshold two things happened. A purple fire sprang behind her and a black one before her thus blocking the onward door thus trapping her. Right before her, there was a small table with seven differently shaped bottles standing out in line.

Hermione did not look surprised at all. "Leave this to be Snape's idea."

Hermione saw a piece of paper lying near the bottles and seizing it she read:

Danger lies before you, while safety's behind

Two of us will help you, which ever you will find  
One among us seven will let you move forward  
And one will let go back instead  
Two among us hold nettle wine  
The rest three hide killers inside, waiting hidden in line  
For choose you must unless stay here forever more you wish  
To guide in your choice, here are four clues:  
First, however slyly the poison hides;  
You will always find some nettle on its left side  
Second, different are those who stand in either end  
But neither is your friend if onward you wish to go  
Third, as clear as it is, all different sizes are  
Neither giant nor dwarf holds death in their inside  
Forth the second right and left are twins once you taste them  
But different at first sight.

Hermione sighed with relief though surprised for this was a puzzle, a riddle actually. It was amazing because most wizards do not possess even an ounce of logic. Hermione started circling the table with the roll of paper in her hands counting before exclaiming: "How simple really!"

She held high the tiny bottle that was going to get her through the black fire. But she hesitated. What could she really achieve? A scream from behind reminded her why they came here in the first place. They risked everything to find the stone before Voldemort could get his hands on it. She mastered all the bravery she could

find in her and drank the tiny bottle in a single gulp (for there was only one gulp anyway).

It felt like ice was flooding her body. She placed back the bottle on the table and braced herself. The black flames licked her body though she did not feel them. For a time all she could see were black flames and then she was through on the other side in the last chamber.

There was definitely someone and it was the one they had expected.

"Professor Quirrell!" – She called.

Quirrell was standing in the middle of the chamber. Behind him there was a magnificent mirror, as high as the ceiling with ornate golden frame, standing on two clawed feet. An inscription was carved atop, which read – Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi.

Professor Quirrell stared blankly at Hermione for truth to be said he was shocked, dumbfounded, stunned and totally surprised seeing her. He stood speechless for quite some time. He had definitely expected to see Harry but not her (though logically Potter was out of the picture as he had met his doom in the forest and though he had survived he was not going to come).

"Miss Granger?" – He managed finally to mumble.

"Professor Quirrell," – Hermione said adding as much spite as she could. "Having trouble with a simple mirror, are we?"

At this remark, Quirrell snapped out of the transfixion Hermione's appearance had put him into.

"Leave something like this to Dumbledore," – He shot irritated then snapped his fingers and out of thin air ropes sprang wrapping tightly her body. "No, be quiet while I examine this interesting mirror."

Quirrell was circling around the mirror tapping it from time to time but nothing happened. "This mirror has to be the way of getting the stone. But how?" He stood before the mirror. "I see the Stone...I'm holding it in my hands...I'm handing it to my master...but where is it?"

While Quirrell was continuing his incomprehensive mumbling Hermione was also examining the mirror with curiosity. She read the inscription a few times but nothing of these words made sense. But she did notice something, which actually was quite visible. She was also standing in front of the mirror though not so close it but she couldn't help but notice that there was no reflection of anything in front of the mirror. Even at the distance where she was standing she should be able to see something yet there was nothing.

Then something in the inscription on the mirror caught her attention. It was the first word. She noticed that read backwards that word spelled Desire. Hermione frowned then silently exclaimed. "Of course, so logical." She then read the entire inscription backwards and this is what she got: "I show not your face but your heart's desire."

"So" – Hermione thought. "All I have to do to get the stone is to think very hard about it. Quirrell won't get it because he doesn't have any logic in him otherwise he would have figured it out already. He had what two hours...pathetic." These thoughts crossed her mind like a flash. She edged to move closer but didn't manage to maintain balance and fell.

Quirrell ignored her completely though he was not getting anywhere near solving the mystery of this mirror. He knew it was only a matter of time before Dumbledore realizes his mistake and returns back to the school. He didn't have much time besides he had already lost two hours.

Quirrell continued to talk to himself. "What does this mirror do? How do I get the Stone? Master, help me!"

Hermione looked up at Quirrell. "What was he talking about?"

"You are not expecting someone to actually help you?" – She couldn't resist asking.

Quirrell looked down at her. "Of course, I am, you silly girl. My master is everywhere with me."

"Are you saying he is in this chamber, right now?" – Hermione looked at him as though he had lost his mind completely.

"Of course, he is." – Quirrell replied angrily then turned his back on her. "Master, help me out."

And to Hermione's horror, a voice answered. "Use the mudblood...use the mudblood..."

Quirrell spun around at once.

"Of course, yes, Granger, come here."

He clapped his hands once, and the ropes fell off. Hermione stood slowly up.

"Come here." – Quirrell repeated. "Look in the mirror and tell me what do you see."

She walked to the mirror. Quirrell stepped behind her. Hermione closed her eyes and then slowly opened them up.

At first she saw nothing but her scared reflection and then she gaped for as hard as she was trying to think of the stone her heart wasn't. What she saw made her cheeks turn a bright red.

"Well?" – Quirrell asked impatiently. "What do you see?"

But Hermione couldn't reply. She simply couldn't find the strength to voice her heart's deepest desire, especially before a stranger even if he wasn't the evil Professor Quirrell harboring the darkest of all wizards.

Quirrell lost patience though he understood that whatever Granger was seeing has nothing to do with his problem.

"Aw, move aside, you useless girl." – And he knocked her aside. Hermione stumbled and fell. "Kill her." – The cold voice said.

"DON'T YOU DARE TOUCHING HER!" – A voice behind them bellowed. Quirrell and Hermione spun around and their jaws fell in utter bemusement.

To be continued...

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 15

### Face to Face

Previously:

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"DON'T YOU DARE TOUCHING HER!" – A voice behind them bellowed. Quirrell and Hermione spun around and their jaws fell in utter bemusement.

On the opened doorframe in a scarlet robe with silver stripes stood no other than Harry Potter, the boy who lived. He still looked pale from his last adventure that almost ended up bad but he was standing up with flashing eyes.

"She means nothing to your master, Quirrell. It is me you want." – Harry said in a more controlled voice.

"No, Harry," – Hermione cried.

"Shut up!" – Quirrell snapped at her. "Yes, Potter, come here."

But Quirrell was a bit afraid of Harry. It was not of Harry's attire but rather the surprisingly adamant look in his eyes. Harry came to the mirror walking slowly but with authority something that was peculiar to nobility.

Harry had managed to occupy all of Quirrell's attention for he paid no more such to Hermione. Harry's look for a split of a second fell somewhere behind Hermione but then returned back to the mirror. It was a good thing that he knew how to use it. Dumbledore was generous enough to let him know. As he came to think of it, he wanted him probably to try. But he knew that he must get the Stone before Quirrell.

"Tell me what you see?" – Quirrell said as Harry stood before the mirror.

The mirror of Erised yet again managed to surprise though. Last time it did something no one could have ever thought possible and this time was no different. Harry looked at his pale reflection then everything changed. His reflection was gone, instead there was a dark lit place drowned in mysterious silvery mist. There he saw two figures one opposite the other. The mist moved slowly away revealing one of the figures...it was Harry but older and the other shortly after...it was barely visible...

All of sudden, the whole vision vanished. Harry was looking back at his reflection that was now smiling at him. It put its hand into its pocket taking out a blood-red stone. It winked putting the Stone back into the pocket, and as it did so, Harry felt something heavy drop into his real pocket. He touched it barely. Somehow – incredibly he's got the Stone.

"What do you see?" – Quirrell asked, growing impatient.

Harry was not listening though. The first vision had flooded the mirror yet again. Harry moved in closer to the mirror. The second figure was nearly revealed.

Quirrell had moved closely behind Harry who was seeing his reflection, the one of Quirrell and someone else although that someone was difficult to make out as it looked more like vapor than a man. But it had red eyes with slits like a snake. Harry had suspected it and even when he entered into this chamber he thought he heard his voice but he was not a hundred percent sure. Now he knew. His mortal enemy occupied Quirrell's body probably to oversee him personally. But it did not matter. The mirror had given him what he needed.

"Well?" – Quirrell shot again.

Harry felt now calm. Maybe there was nothing to fear but fear itself, as Thant had repeatedly said.

"I'm shaking hands with Dumbledore." – Harry lied out straight. "I've won the house cup for Gryffindor."

Quirrell cursed again.



"Get out of the way, boy!" – Quirrell said pushing Harry aside. And that's what Harry wanted to put some distance between them.

He made just ten paces and turned around.

"You played your game well, Professor Quirrell." – Harry said thus distracting him from the mirror again. Quirrell turned around staring at Harry. "You made it in such a way I would come to think that Snape was behind everything."

Quirrell blinked twice but then laughed. It was not his usual quivering treble, but cold and sharp. "Yes, Severus does seem the type, doesn't he? So useful to have him swooping around like an overgrown bat, next to him, who would suspect, p-p-poor, st-stuttering P-Professor Quirrell?"

"And then you tried to kill me but Snape delayed long enough..."

"Yes, he did. I would have succeeded earlier if he wasn't muttering his little countercurse trying to save you. Your friend, here, Ms. Granger broke my eye contact as she accidentally knocked me off on her way to set Snape's robes on fire. I just needed another few seconds and I'd have got you off that broom."

"Well, that's the part I don't get. Why would Snape want to save me? He didn't seem that type." – Harry wanted the truth and it seemed that Quirrell was giving in.

"Yes, he wanted to save you." – Quirrell said. "He and your father went together to school. They loathed each other though Snape never wanted you dead."

It was Harry's turn to gape. There was so little he knew of his real parents although he would not be very surprised if what Quirrell was saying were to be true. Snape seemed at times wanting to curse Harry, and at times just the opposite. It was very confusing, and Harry had wished he knew why. Now, he got part of the answer. But now was not the moment for those revelations.

"Why do you think he wanted to referee your next match?" – Quirrell continued. "He wanted to make sure I don't do it again but he needn't bothered as Dumbledore was there anyway. In the end everyone thought that he was trying to stop Gryffindor from winning

making himself unpopular...but what a waste of time anyway since I'm going to kill you tonight."

"I see." – Harry said these words with a big dose of mockery.

"You are too nosy, Potter." – Quirrell shot.

"Well, I happen to be." – Harry shot back. "I don't particularly enjoy having to share Halloween with a troll the one you let in so you go and check what's guarding the stone but unfortunately for you Snape cut you off though he did get bitten by Fluffy."

"Indeed, with everyone running around looking for the troll, Snape, who already suspected me, headed straight to the third floor to cut me off." – Quirrell confirmed. "My troll not only did no manage to beat you to death but that three headed dog failed even to bite Snape's leg off."

"I saw you with Snape into the forest." – Harry continued.

"Yes," – Quirrell said idly. "He was on to me already. He just wanted to know what my progress was. Logically, he tried to scar me off as though he could...when I had Lord Voldemort on my side... "

"I heard you some days afterwards, sobbing. Was your task so impossible....?" – Harry trailed off. He did not want to finish the sentence. He did not want him yet to know that he was aware of his enemy's presence.

A spasm of fear flitted through Quirrell this time. He closed his eyes as though remembering an unpleasant moment.

"I sometimes, find it hard to do my master's bidding. He's a great wizard and I'm weak..."

"Oh," – Harry said with a well simulated sympathy.

"Yes, he is with me wherever I go." – Quirrell muttered quietly. "I met him when I was traveling around the world. I was foolish, full of ridiculous ideas about Good and Evil. Lord Voldemort taught me the truth – there is no good or evil, there is only power and those too weak enough to reach it. Since this day, I have served him faithfully,

although I've let him down on several occasions. He has had to be hard on me." – Quirrell suddenly shivered at that memory. "He doesn't forgive easily, especially when I failed to steal the Stone from Gringotts, he was most displeased. And from then on, he decided to keep a closer eye on me..."

"I see." – Harry said with understanding. "Would that be why you had to make all those night straws to the forest? To find the nearest unicorn blood donation office?"

Quirrell stared blankly at Harry. He was clearly sensing the mockery in his voice. Was indeed this boy so brave or so foolish? Did he know whom he was dealing with?

"What?" – Harry asked looking straight at Quirrell. "Did you get tired speaking with the insolent young boy? Why don't you let master take on from here? After all, he's been hiding well inside you, as you said. I'm sure he wants to chat. It has been eleven years."

Harry was speaking with defiance though he was afraid of the encounter (who wouldn't be?). "Oh, come on, he, the great wizard can't be afraid to face an eleven year old boy, can he?"

Quirrell rooted on the spot stared blankly at Harry then the horrible high voice spoke.

"Let's not disappoint the boy. Let me speak with him."

"But master...you're not strong enough for this..." – Quirrell tried to object though he had no idea how did Harry know about him.

"You mean he is too weak." – Harry shot while Quirrell was continuing to hesitate.

"I'll speak with him. I have enough strength for thisss." – The high voice hissed.

Quirrell reached up slowly unfolding his turban. The turban fell away. Quirrell's head looked strangely small without it. He turned slowly on the spot.

Anyone in Harry's place would have screamed at this sight. But Harry couldn't scream even if he wanted, the pure blood of the

Necromancers running in his veins was keeping him cool, but even if it wasn't he would not have screamed, as he would have been too petrified.

But someone did scream. It was Hermione for the moment she saw the turban fall and what was hiding inside she couldn't help herself. But Quirrell and the thing inside him ignored her. She wasn't important.

Where there should have been Quirrell's back of the head, there was a face, the most terrible face, Harry could have imagined, and although he had seen it in the mirror, it was even more terrible. It was chalk white with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils like a real snake.

"Harry Potter..." – It hissed.

Harry stood his ground, his cool reaffirming itself.

"Voldemort!"

"Yes. See what I've become...a mere shadow and vapor." – The face said. "I can have form only when I occupy someone's body but then there are always those who would let me into their hearts and minds..."

"How sweet of them..." – Harry said with clear disgust in his voice.

"Yes, and once I have the Stone, the Elixir of Life; I'll be able to create a body of my own. Now...why don't you give the Stone, the Stone that is in your right pocket?"

So he knew. No matter, Harry thought, he's not getting his hands on it. Harry stepped backwards.

"Don't be a fool, Harry." – The face snarled. "Better save your own life and join me...or meet your parents' end...they died begging me for mercy..."

But Harry just saw his father in the mirror. And it was clear to him that his father will never indulge Voldemort in such a way. The anger Harry thought had gone away swelled in him again. His eyes flashed and Harry stepped forward but there was a hidden menace in this

move. Quirrell instinctively stepped backwards surprising both Voldemort and Hermione.

"Join you?" – Harry whispered these words. "LIAR! I'LL NEVER JOIN YOU!"

Voldemort smiled grimly.

"Touching, Harry. I've always valued bravery...yes, boy, your parents were brave...I killed your father first; and he tried to put up a courageous fight...then I killed your mother though she needn't have died...she wanted to protect you, and unless you want her to have died in vain, you will give me the Stone."

"IN YOUR DREAMS, I'LL NEVER GIVE YOU THE STONE!" – Harry shouted.

Voldemort screamed: "SEIZE HIM!"

And in the next second, he felt Quirrell's hand on his neck trying to squeeze the life out of him. Harry fought back but then the unbelieving, needle sharp pain returned crossing though his scar. It felt as though his head was about to split in two; he yelled in pain, his thoughts raced, thinking of his sisters, Thant, Saptienna, Hermione, Ron and Alamar, his parents and he doubled his efforts with all his might, and to his surprise Quirrell did let go off him. The pain in his head lessened. He looked around to see where Quirrell had gone, and saw him crouching on the ground, hunched in pain, looking widely at his fingers, blistering before his eyes.

"SEIZE HIM, SEIZE HIM!" – Voldemort shrieked again. Quirrell pinned Harry to the ground, his knees on Harry's chest, grabbing his neck with both hands. Harry's scar was almost blinding him with pain, and yet he could still see Quirrell howling in agony.

The thoughts of his friends and family flooded his mind and heart again, and the feeling grew enough, Quirrell removed his hands off Harry. Harry pushed hard and threw Quirrell off him. He did not attack him as he was looking with horror to his hands.

"Master, my hands...my hands..." – Quirrell was crying. "What's happening, master?"

Quirrell's hands were blistering then hardening and slowly turning to ash. Harry looked bewilderedly at his palms; they looked red, burned and shiny.

"KILL HIM!" – Voldemort screeched. "KILL HIM NOW!"

Quirrell was raising his hand to perform a deadly spell but Harry, by instinct, reached up and grabbed Quirrell's face...

"AAAARGH!"

Quirrell fell to his knees. His face was blistering too, and then Harry understood. Quirrell could not touch his bare skin, not without suffering terrible pain. Harry knew that his only chance lied with keeping Quirrell in sufficient pain so he would not have the time to perform a curse.

Harry moved toward Quirrell catching him by his arm and hung on as tight as he could. Quirrell screamed trying to throw Harry off...the pain in Harry's scar was building up...he could not see...he was only hearing Quirrell's shrieks of pain, and the screeching of Voldemort, "Kill him!", as well as other voices (among which was Hermione's), maybe in his head crying, "Harry! Harry!"

Then he felt falling to the stone ground, the Stone clutched in his hand. He opened his eyes and his bare vision saw Quirrell falling apart all in ashes then everything went dark, he felt falling into blackness, down...down...down...

Something gold was glinting above him. The Snitch! He tried to catch but his arms were too heavy. He blinked. It wasn't the snitch. It was a pair of glasses – how strange. Harry blinked again. The smiling face of Albus Dumbledore swam into view above him.

"Good afternoon, Harry!" – Dumbledore said.

Harry stared at him then it all came back to him. "Sir! The Stone! It was Quirrell!"

"Calm yourself, Harry." – Dumbledore smiled. "You're a little behind the times. Professor Quirrell does not have the Stone!"

"Did Voldemort get it? Sir..."

"Harry, please try to relax, or Madam Pomfrey will throw me out."

Harry swallowed and looked around. It was now that he realized that he must be in the hospital wing. He was lying in a bed with linen white sheets, and next to him was a table piled with what looked like half the candy shop.

"Tokens from your friends and admirers." – Dumbledore said beaming. "What happened down in the dungeons is a complete secret, so, naturally, the whole school knows! I believe your friends Misters Fred and George Weasley tried to send you a toilet seat. No doubt they thought this would amuse you but Madam Pomfrey confiscated it, as it was not very hygienic."

"How long have I been here?"

"Four days, and I think your friends, Misters Ronald Weasley and Alamar Darkstone, Misses Granger, Cassie and Xsi Solmyr will be most relieved you've come around. They have been extremely worried."

"Cassie and Xsi?" – Harry blurted out unbelievably (not really paying attention to what Dumbledore had told him just a moment ago). "When did they get alright?"

"Evidently, Misses Xsi and Cassie Solmyr are made of tougher material anyone thought. They woke up just three days ago."

"Phew!" – Harry said then added up. "What about Fred, George – I passed by the troll chamber and they were well...oh my, and what about Ron and Alamar?"

"Relax, dear boy, everyone is alright."

"And Hermione, the brave, brave Hermione, she came close with..."

"Harry, calm down, or Madame Pomfrey will for sure throw me out." – Dumbledore calmed him and explained. "Madame Pomfrey treated Misters George and Fred Weasley after their close encounter with the troll, and they are just fine. Well, with a few bruises here and there but they are alright. Mr. Darkstone and Mr. Ronald Weasley

were simply knocked off but come around nicely. Ms. Granger needed a bit more time to rest as she had more an emotional shock than a physical injury but she's back to her feet."

"Oh, I feel definitely much better." – Harry said relieved.

"I'm glad you do." – Dumbledore smiled.

"And the stone, sir, what..."

"Evidently, it seems I can't seem to distract you. Very well," – Dumbledore sighed. "Professor Quirrell did not get the Stone from you because he was quite dead. I arrived to prevent him from getting it but it was not necessary, because, if I may say so, you've done quite a good job on your own."

"You got there? So Kaiser warned you?"

"Yes, and it was quite the surprise and scary basket you threw at us Harry. Lord Solmyr and Lady Saptienna were scared out of their wits when they learnt what you have done but I do have to say that I was impressed though you still have a lot of explaining to do. I just came in while Voldemort's soul was leaving the already destroyed body of Quirrell."

"So it was you that called me?"

"I feared I might have been too late."

"You nearly were. I couldn't have kept him off the Stone for long..."

"Not the Stone, dear boy, you...the effort involved nearly killed you. And for a moment, a terrible moment, I thought it did. As for the Stone, it was destroyed."

"Destroyed?" – Harry said blankly. "But then...your friend...Nicolas Flamel...?"

"Oh, you know about Nicolas?" – Dumbledore said, sounding quite delighted. "You do your thing properly, don't you? Well, we had a little chat and agreed it was for the best."

"But this means that he and his wife would die, wouldn't they?"



"They have enough elixir stored to set their affairs in order but then yes, they would die."

Dumbledore smiled at the look of amazement on Harry's face.

"To one as young as you it must seem incredible, but to Nicolas and Perenelle, it is like going to bed after a long, a very long day. After all, to the well organized mind, death is just but the next great adventure. And the Stone is not such a great thing – money and life as much as you want. The two things humans would choose above all but the trouble lies in that that the humans have the knack of choosing those things that are worst for them."

Harry lay on his bed in a loss for words while Dumbledore just hummed, smiling at the ceiling. Harry had some questions that needed an answer.

"Sir," – Harry said. "Voldemort...I mean even with the Stone gone, he's going to try other ways of coming back, isn't he?"

"Good, Harry, good. You should always call him with his proper name. And yes, I'm afraid so. There might be other ways for him to come back."

"So he isn't gone?"

"No, he is not. He is still out there somewhere, looking for another body, as he is not truly alive, he can not be killed. He left Quirrell to die, which shows how little mercy he has for his followers, just as much as he has for his enemies. Nevertheless Harry, you have delayed his return, and if the next someone takes to delay him while seeing what a lost cause it is, he may never return to power."

But Harry had more questions, especially few.

"Sir, there are some other things, I would like to know...to know the truth about..."

"The truth?" – Dumbledore sighed. "The truth is a beautiful but dangerous thing so it should be treated with caution. However, I shall answer your questions unless I have a very good reason not to, in which case I ask your forgiveness. I shall not, of course, lie."

Harry took a deep breath. He wanted to know who his true parents were but some undefined feeling was directing him not to ask this question, not yet. He knew why Voldemort had tried to kill him when he was young but there was something that he wanted to know and it was connected with Snape (as much as he hated to think of it).

"Professor Quirrell mentioned that my father and Snape knew each other and loathed one another. There are times in which Snape looks at me as though he wants to curse me and others when it is the exact opposite. Why is that? It is so confusing."

Dumbledore was a bit taken aback by Harry's question. He knew the reason why Snape was acting in this way but he couldn't tell the boy. He had promised Snape not to.

"Professor Snape," – Dumbledore corrected Harry. "Well, your father and Professor Snape detested each other the moment they met, not unlike you and Mr. Malfoy." – And then with a smile Dumbledore added. "And then your father did something Professor Snape could never forgive."

"What?" – Harry raised an eyebrow.

"He saved his life."

"What?"

"Funny, the way people's minds work, isn't it?" – Dumbledore said dreamily. "Professor Snape could not bear being in your father's debt so during this year he tried his best protecting you, hoping this would settle his debt with him, and then he could continue to hate the memory of him in peace."

Harry did notice that Dumbledore avoided answering the second part of his question but he wasn't giving up this easily. "But then why does he look at me sometimes like..."

"Alas, Harry, this I can't really tell you. It is not my secret therefore I can't divulge it."

"Why couldn't Quirrell touch me?" – Harry asked the second thing that he thought important.

"Ah," – Dumbledore beamed. "Your mother died protecting, no saving you. If there is one thing Voldemort does not understand, that is love. He hadn't realized that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. No, not a scar, the mark lives in you, in your very skin, as to have been loved so deeply, even though the person had gone will provide you with protection forever; and so Quirrell full of hatred, greed and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony for him to touch a person marked by something so good."

Dumbledore now become very interested into a bird outside the window giving some time to Harry to dry his eyes on the sheets. When he regained his voice, he turned again to Dumbledore.

"The Invisibility cloak – do you know who sent it to me?"

"Ah, the cloak, fascinating object, your father left it in my possession, and I thought you might like it." – Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "He used it to sneak around the castle, and steal food from the kitchen when he was here."

Harry smiled picturing his father moving around the castle like he was. He also wondered whether he had taken his mother under it or did he use it to sneak on girls.

"Ah, sir, there is something else."

"Fire away."

"I'm not really sure how to put this into words, sir." – Harry said coming at last to one of the strangest parts of his adventure. Dumbledore looked at him expectantly. "When I first found the mirror of Erised..."

"Your heart's deepest desire showed you your family standing before you...." – Dumbledore cut in.

"Yes, but..." – Harry stressed on the word but. "But then I felt very strange..."

"This is understandable Harry."

"No, you don't understand." – Harry cut him off. Dumbledore looked up. "I felt very strange as an unearthly song vibrated in the room, filling me with...with uncanny joy and happiness, I could hardly describe, and then..." – Harry paused remembering exactly how it happened. "And then I heard a voice, my father's voice. I turned around and I saw them both standing before me. They were neither ghost nor truly flesh but I could feel their touch, their love. I spoke to them and they answered back. They told me that I'll be seeing them three more times. I was hoping, sir, could you tell me, if the mirror has ever acted this way before?"

This time Dumbledore was speechless. He was looking at Harry in total bemuse and shock. What Harry had just described was impossible for the mirror had never done anything of the kind. The mirror itself did not possess such power. But then how to explain what had occurred? Dumbledore thought of one and only one possibility. But how was this possible, he wondered. He had to search deeper into the mirror's history – maybe there was more to this mirror than anyone thought.

"Alas, Harry, I have never heard of the mirror doing what you just described. The mirror shows only your heart's deepest desires. But in due time, I may have an answer for you."

Harry was not disappointed in the lack of explanation. He clearly saw that Dumbledore was disturbed by this revelation. He thought it best not tell him of the last surprise the mirror kicked in when he saw Voldemort's soul reflected into the mirror. But he was curious about one last thing.

"Sir, how did I get the Stone? One moment I was starring at the mirror and in the next the Stone was in my pocket?"

"Ah," – Dumbledore smiled. "I'm glad you asked that. It was one of my most brilliant ideas, and between you and me, that says something. You see, only the one who wanted to find the Stone, find it but not use it, could get it, otherwise you'd only see yourself brewing the Elixir of Life or making gold. My brain sometimes amazes even me...now enough questions. I suggest you take on these sweets. Ah! Bettie Bott's Every Flavor Beans! I was quite unfortunate in my youth to come across a vomit flavored one, and since then, I'm afraid I lost my liking for them. But I hope I'll be safe with a nice toffee one, don't you?"

Dumbledore smiled and took one golden-brown bean into his mouth. He choked the very next instant. "Alas! Ear wax!"

Madam Pomfrey was a nice woman although a bit strict.

"Just five minutes."

"No, absolutely not."

"But you let Professor Dumbledore."

"Professor Dumbledore is the headmaster, and you need rest."

"Look, I'm resting and everything. Oh, come on, Madam Pomfrey."

"Oh, very well, five minutes."

And she let Ron, Alamar and Hermione in.

"Harry!"

Hermione looked like she wanted to put her arms around him but Harry was glad she held herself as his head was still pounding.

"Harry, it was so...so..." – Hermione couldn't find the proper words.

"I know, Hermione." – Harry cut her off before she gets to the point of remembering these horrifying moments she had to witness. "But I have to say, you guys, were simply brilliant, brave and very foolish."

"Foolish?" – Ron and Alamar exclaimed stunned.

"Yes, how could you let Hermione go and face Voldemort alone?" – Harry raised his voice a bit.

"Well," – Alamar answered diplomatically. "It just happened that way. Believe me it was not our first choice but you know Ron and I are best at chess, then Fred and George jumped on the troll and Hermione was left with the rest."

"Yeah, and now the whole school's talking about it." – Ron added.

"And why don't you tell us what really happened down there because, well, Hermione did not divulge anything? She was waiting for you to wake up." – Alamar inquired. It was obvious he was dying to learn what had really happened down there.

Harry looked at Hermione and as she nodded Harry dived in. It was one of those rare moments when the true story sounded even more strange and exciting than the wildest rumors. Harry told them everything, well almost everything. He omitted only the mirror and his adventure into the forest but the rest – the meeting with Quirrell as Hermione was about to be..., and then the chat that followed, and how Snape fitted in.

"So we had guessed it right?" – Alamar exclaimed.

"Yes." – Hermione nodded.

"So the Stone's destroyed?" – Ron asked. "So Flamel's just going to die?"

"Yeah," – Harry said. "Or as Dumbledore put it, for the well-organized mind death is just the beginning of a new journey."

"I've always said he's off his rockers." – Ron said looking very impressed at how crazy his hero was.

"So what happened then to you three?" – Harry said.

"Well, Professor Dumbledore came in and pushed you from Quirrell who turned into ashes and just before that Voldemort's soul or whatever it was got out and vanished quickly through the opened door. Dumbledore was afraid that we might have lost you. I ran to you and you still had pulse. He then picked you up and I followed him. We reached the troll chamber where Fred and George were lying on the ground. The troll was beaten though I still can't truly get how. I have no idea what they had done but they looked pretty banged up. Dumbledore levitated them with his wand and we left the chamber reaching the chess room. He left Fred and George near Alamar and Ron and told me to wait for him. He returned with Professors McGonagall and Snape who picked the four up, then we went to the key room where riding behind Dumbledore's back I got out. And we came straight into the infirmary. And that's it." –

Hermione explained. She shot everything out quickly and it was clear to the other three that she had waited long for that moment.

"And as he came in did he say anything?" – Harry asked.

"Oh, yeah, he said 'He went after him, after all?'"

"Do you think he meant you to do it?" – Alamar said thoughtfully.  
"Sending your father's cloak and everything?"

"Of course not," – Hermione flared up. "Don't be ridiculous! I meant to say that's terrible...Harry could have been killed."

"You as well," – Ron gently reminded.

"Yes, well, but Harry...I mean Dumbledore would never..."

"Dumbledore is a funny man." – Harry said thoughtfully. "I think he sort of wanted me to try. I think he knows more or less everything that happens in the castle. I reckon he had a pretty good idea we would try, so instead of stopping us, he taught us enough to help. I don't believe it was an accident that he let me know how the mirror worked. It was almost like he wanted me to face Voldemort if I could... though I think he did not expect that it will be you, Hermione, who would reach him first."

"Yeah, and speaking of which," – Hermione said. "How did you do that? You were supposed to be at St Mungo. How did you reach school and then straight down to the mirror chamber?"

"Yeah," – Alamar joined in. "Not to mention what you were doing in the forest in the first place?"

"Well," – Harry mumbled. "That's rather a long story and Madame Pomfrey is sure to come to throw you out."

"Don't change the subject, Nimbus." – Alamar pointed at him with a finger at this cheating.

"OUT! You've had nearly fifteen minutes!" – Madame Pomfrey came in.

"We'll get you another time, Nimbus where you can't escape." – Alamar said while leaving. Harry smiled too.

After a good night sleep, Harry felt nearly back to normal.

"I want to go to the feast." – Harry said while Madam Pomfrey was straightening up his many candy boxes. "Can I?"

"Professor Dumbledore said you can." – She said a bit stiffly as though going to the feast was a bad call. "And you have other visitors but I'm letting them one by one."

Harry wondered who that might be. The door slid open and Hagrid walked in. He sat near Harry, took one look at him and burst into tears.

"It's all...all...my ruddy fault." – He sobbed in his hands. "I told the evil git how ter get past Fluffy. I told him! It was the only thing he didn't know. Yeh could've died! All for ..."

"Hagrid!" – Harry said, shocked to see Hagrid with grief and remorse, great tears leaking down his beard. "Hagrid, he would have found out somehow. He is Voldemort, after all. He would have found out even if you haven't told him."

"Yeh could've died!" – Hagrid sobbed. "An' don' say the name!"

"VOLDEMORT!" – Harry bellowed, and Hagrid shocked, stopped crying. "I've met him and I'll call him by his name. Please, cheer up, the Stone's gone. Please, have a chocolate frog; I've got loads of them..."

"That reminds me." – Hagrid said, while wiping his nose. "I've got yeh a present."

"It's not a stoat sandwich, is it?" said Harry anxiously, and at last Hagrid gave a weak chuckle. "Nah. Dumbledore gave me the day off yesterday ter fix it. 'Course, he shoulda sacked me instead - anyway, got yeh this..."

It seemed to be a handsome, leather covered book. Harry opened it slowly, with curiosity. It was full of wizard photographs. Smiling and waving at him from every page were his mother and father.



"Sent owls off ter all yer parents' old school friends, askin' fer photos... knew yeh didn' have any... d'yeh like it?"

Harry couldn't speak, but Hagrid understood then left.

The door opened again. Harry lifted his head and saw Cassie and Xsi burst in.

"Hey, Nimbus!" – Cassie cheered up.

"What's this?" – Xsi pointed at the book.

Harry did not reply but just handed it over. Xsi and Cassie looked in it curiously. Then they just hugged Harry.

"Oh! Harry." – Xsi said.

"I can't believe you solved it." – Cassie said, tears in her eyes, which she wiped out quickly before saying. "Tell us what really happened?"

"No, I'm asking the questions now." – Harry cut her off. "Why did you go to the forest? What happened there?"

"What about you, ha?" – Cassie shot back. "What were you doing in there? What were those creatures with the nets? Mom and Dad told us you scared them into third incarnation."

"I asked first." – Harry said firmly.

"Actually, Nimbus, we did ask first."

"Yes, but about a different matter." – Harry countered. "Besides, your going into the forest is connected directly to mine so you're first."

"Really?" – Cassie eyed him curiously.

"Alright, we first then you." – Xsi said. "Well, your brilliant sisters decided to follow Quirrell. He was the one that looked the most unsuspecting therefore the most likely candidate though you only suspected him. Snape of course also fitted. So anyway, we decided to keep an eye on Quirrell. But he was a sneaky one..."

"And quite elusive at times." – Cassie added.

"Yes, so...one night he slipped again. But we were ready for him. We saw him, wearing a cloak, as though this could not tell who he was, and going straight to the forest. Naturally, we followed. But when he reached the forest, we kind of lost him. We searched around but found nothing until we heard a horrible scream. It scared the hell out of us but we followed it."

"You should have gone back to the castle." – Harry remarked, looking now pale.

"For what? A little scream, well not so little, but still...anyway we followed it till we reached a glade with small trees. There, we saw a puddle of silver blood but no bodies, no nothing."

"Yeah, totally disappointing, so we followed the blood trace."

"And then," – Here Xsi shivered at the much thought. "We heard an odd sound as though something was slithering slightly above the ground, a cloak maybe. So, we happily thought, we found him. But it seems we found more than we bargained for."

"Yeah," – Cassie quivered. "When we turned around the trees we saw a cloaked figure bent over a unicorn drinking its blood. It was so horrible, the poor beast."

"But it seemed that the cloaked figure had finished the feast. He stood up a bit oddly. He was moving backwards. And then, it happened."

"What happened?" – Harry asked trembling, and somehow he did not want to know.

"Well, it was Quirrell. His hood fell off. But he did not see us not that it mattered." – Xsi said, pale and sore. "I've...never sensed anything of the kind. It was like..."

She couldn't finish her sentence so Cassie carried on.

"It was like facing the worst nightmare but not with your eyes. How shall I put it?...It felt like feeling a surge of hatred and pain in the

same time although there are no words, really, capable of describing this feeling, and then all went dark."

"I felt falling in a dark cold pit with all walls screeching and screaming. Well, anyway, it was a horrible experience." – Xsi finished.

"And you did not see anything else beside Quirrell that is?" – Harry asked.

"No." – Xsi said firmly. "Why?"

"Well," – Harry hesitated. His sisters looked at him sternly. "I don't think the encounter with Quirrell and Voldemort brought you down."

"WHAT?" – Both sisters exclaimed shocked. "How do you mean that?"

And Harry told them what he had done after they had found them. Xsi and Cassie listened intensively gasping and exclaiming at the right places. They looked at Harry and saw him in a new light. They never thought their brother capable of what he told them. It was so unlike him.

"Were you out of your mind?" – Cassie finally blurted out.

"Yeah, what possessed you to do this?" – Xsi asked still shocked.

"Well, I think it was a combination of several factors – fear of losing you, anger, mostly anger. I have never felt such hatred, such anger in me, and I let it consume me and it almost got me killed – twice." – Harry admitted.

"Yeah, it could have." – Cassie said sweeping her tears. "But well, you've done well beyond our expectations."

"Well, that's more than I expected to hear. It sounded like a compliment." – Harry interjected with a hint of sarcasm.

"Yeah, but don't get ahead of yourself, little brother." – Cassie snapped though she was smiling.

"Yeah, time to go to the feast." – Xsi said. "Though, you won't enjoy it that much."

"Why not?" – Harry raised an eyebrow. "You haven't..."

"No, relax. But Slytherin has won the house cup."

"Yo, sis, you say it like it is a bad thing." – Cassie said offended.

"Yeah, and it is." – Xsi smiled.

They all laughed.

"So, I gather Gryffindor is at the bottom?" – Harry asked.

"Yeah, and Hufflepuff right up your heels." – Xsi confirmed.

"Well, losing hundred and fifty points in one night tends to do just that." – Cassie added. "Anyway, it is time to go. Come on."

Harry, Cassie and Xsi made their way down to the end-of-year feast. The only delay that occurred was Madam Pomfrey insisting to make a last minute checkup. The Great Hall was already full and decked in Slytherin's colors.

Cassie and Xsi escorted Harry to Gryffindor table then headed to their respectful house tables. Harry tried to ignore all those that were staring at him or just standing up to see him.

Hopefully, Dumbledore arrived shortly after. The babble stopped at once.

"Another year gone!" – Dumbledore said cheerfully. "And I must trouble you with an old man's wheezing before we sink our teeth into our delicious feast. What a year it has been! I hope your heads are bit fuller than they were...and you have the whole summer to empty them before the next year starts..."

"Now as I understand it, the house cup needs awarding. The points stand as: in forth place Gryffindor with one hundred ninety two points," – the Gryffindors barely made a sound, "in third place with three hundred and eighty six points – Hufflepuff," – there were some cheers from the Hufflepuff table but weak, "in second place,

Ravenclaw with four hundred and twenty six points," – louder cheers were heard from the Ravensclaws, "And in first place with four hundred and seventy two points – Slytherin House!"

A storm of cheering and stamping broke out from the Slytherin table. Harry could see Draco Malfoy banging his goblet, it was sickening sight.

"Yes, yes, Slytherin, well done, but..." – Dumbledore lifted a finger. "Recent events must be taken into account."

The room went silent. The smile on Slytherins faded away.

"Ahem," – Dumbledore said, "I have a few last minute points to dish out. Let me see. Ah, yes..."

First to Mr. Ronald Weasley..."

Ron went purple at once. He looked like reddish with bad sunburn.

"...for the best played game of chess, Hogwarts has seen in many, many years, I award Gryffindor house – fifty points!"

Gryffindor cheers almost raised the ceiling. The stars seemed to quiver. Percy Weasley could have been heard screaming, "My little brother, my youngest brother, passing McGonagall's giant chess set."

"Yes, yes, well done, although, this victory had been shared, so...for the cool use of strategy in a dangerous moment of the game, I award Mr. Alamar Darkstone of Hufflepuff fifty points!"

This time, it was the Hufflepuff table that erupted, and the Ravenclaw smiles faded, as this meant that they had gone one place down.

"Third to Misters Fred and George Weasley," – Everyone turned to the twins. "I award each of them fifty points for defeating the most feared mountain troll while protecting a fellow student." The cheers were growing stronger but the twins were unusually quiet. It seemed that the battle with the troll was something they did not want to be reminded so soon of.

"Forth to Miss Hermione Granger, for the cool use of logic in the face of fire and bravery at facing Professor Quirrell in the mirror chamber, I award Gryffindor sixty points."

Hermione buried her face in her hands. Harry strongly suspected she had burst into tears.

"Fifth to Mr. Harry Potter who was attacked and blessed in the forest but found strength to come to the rescue of his friends and demonstrated pure nerve and outstanding courage, I award Gryffindor seventy points."

The din was deafening. Those who could add up, quickly realized that now Gryffindor had exactly the same points as Slytherin – four hundred and seventy two. If Dumbledore had given them just one more point...

Dumbledore raise his hand, and the room went gradually silent.

"And last but not least, it takes a great deal of bravery to stand up against your enemies but just as much to stand up to your friends therefore I award ten points to Mr. Neville Longbottom."

Someone standing outside the Great Hall might well have thought some sort of explosion had taken place, so loud was the noise that erupted from the Gryffindor table. Harry, Ron, and Hermione stood up to yell and cheer as Neville, white with shock, disappeared under a pile of people hugging him. He had never won as much as a point for Gryffindor before. Harry still cheering nudged Ron in the ribs and pointed at Malfoy who couldn't have looked more stunned and horrified, if he'd just had the Body-Bind Curse put on him.

"Which means," – Dumbledore called over the storm of applause, for even Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff were celebrating the downfall of Slytherin, "We need a little change of decoration."

He clapped his hands. In an instant, the green hangings became scarlet and the silver became gold; the huge Slytherin serpent vanished and a towering Gryffindor lion took its place. Snape was shaking Professor McGonagall's hand, with a horrible, forced smile.

Harry was so happy. This has been the best year, better than Christmas or knocking out mountain trolls, this was an evening he would never forget.

Harry had almost forgotten but the results of the exams were to come out, and they did. Strangely enough he and Ron have passed with good marks. Hermione and Xsi had the best grades of the first years. Even Neville scraped through, his good Herbology marks compensated for his abysmal Potions. They had hoped that Goyle would not pass given he look just as stupid as he looked mean, but as Alamar said you can't have everything in life.

And then all of sudden, their wardrobes were empty, their trunks packed, notes were handed to students reminding them that no magic was to be used over the holidays (the Weasley's twins sadly told them: "We always kind of hoped they'd forget to give those."); Hagrid was there to take them across the lake with the fleet of boats. They were boarding Hogwarts Express; laughing and talking as the country side became greener and tidier; eating Bettie Bott's Every Flavor Beans as they sped by Muggle towns; pulling off their wizard robes and putting back on their muggle clothes; pulling into platform nine and three quarters at King's Cross Station.

It took them quite a time to get through the barrier. An old wizened guard was up the ticket barrier letting them go through the gate in twos and threes so they didn't attract attention by all bursting out a solid wall at once thus alarming the ignorant Muggles.

"You must come and stay this summer." – Ron said. "All of you...I'll send you owls."

"Thanks!" – Harry said. "I'll take it into consideration if these two do not manage to dispose of me."

"Don't worry, Nimbus." – Xsi said innocently looking.

"We'll certainly try..." – Cassie added. "...not to."

"Bye Harry!"

"See you, Potter!"

"Still famous!" – Ron said, grinning at him.

"Yeah, I guess so." – Harry sighed.

He, Ron and Hermione passed through the gateway together. Alamar, Xsi and Cassie followed them.

"There he is, Mom, there he is, look!"

It was Ginny Weasley, Ron's youngest sister but she wasn't pointing at Ron.

"It's Harry Potter. Mom, look!"

"Be quiet Ginny. It is rude to point at people!"

Mrs. Weasley smiled down at them.

"Busy year?"

"Very," – Harry said. "Thank you for the fudge and the sweater, Mrs. Weasley."

"Oh, it was nothing, dear."

"Harry!" – A deep voice called.

Harry turned around and came face to face with Thant. Lord Solmyr looked imposing in his dark silver attire, his white mantle sweeping the ground. His eyes met Mrs. Weasley.

"You must be Mrs. Weasley." – He said politely, gently bending down to kiss Mrs. Weasley's hand.

"Yes, and you are?"

"Thant Solmyr, Harry's guardian!"

Mrs. Weasley's eyes had widened in surprise. She knew of the Solmyrs to be the richest family in the wizard world but she had never expected that they had taken guardianship of Harry Potter. She also never thought that Lord Solmyr would be so down-to-earth.



"I wish to thank you for sending Harry, Christmas presents." – Thant said.

"Oh, it was nothing really." – Mrs. Weasley went red.

"But it is not the value that counts it is the gesture." – Thant smiled.  
"We appreciate it."

"Dad!" – Cassie and Xsi jumped on Thant, hugging him. "Thank you for...well...you know!"

"Just don't do it again." – Thant said, looking with love at them.

"We won't...we promise." – Xsi said.

"You as well, Nimbus. You gave us quite the scare." – Thant said.

"I know," – Harry looked down at his feet. "I'm sorry."

"Well, we'll talk about it home." – Thant said but then turned his attention to Mrs. Weasley. "Would you and your husband care to visit us this summer at Solmyr Castle?"

Mrs. Weasley was taken aback by this proposition.

"We could arrange something." – She said finally.

"Great!" – Thant bowed gently, and then said. "Harry, Cassie, Xsi, get in the car. I'll have Moandor take your luggage."

"Sure, just a nick." – Harry said hurrying to say last goodbye.

"So, we'll meet again in the summer. Capers Forever!" – Xsi said.

"Yeah, agreed." – Alamar said. "Ron, Hermione, you are all welcome to visit me as well."

"Alright, we'll set the schedules later." – Ron smiled.

"See you, soon." – Hermione said, speeding up to her parents.

"Yeah, see you, Hermione." – Harry said. "Ron, I guess we'll be exchanging visits."

"Yeah, can't wait for it." – Ron grinned.

"Harry, Cassie, Xsi!" – Thant called.

"We're coming!" – The three yelled back. "See you!"

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Book 2: The Heir of Slytherin

### Chapter 16

#### Introductions

The summer was hot, so hot that the land was bone dry. Blackshire has not seen so many days without rain that Thant was thinking of invoking some but at least in the castle was nicely cool.

Harry was in his room with Alamar who had come for few weeks. They were spending their time in the most unusual way – writing their homeworks for the summer. Actually, it was not so unusual, especially if you knew the reason, which was very simple – they just wanted to get rid of this unpleasant part of the summer so afterwards they could have some fun.

Cassie and Xsi, also most unusually, were not trying to sabotage their efforts. The boys of course have not seen them for a week as they had mysteriously disappeared out of their radar. They were probably in their rooms cooking some mischief but this was most welcomed (well not the mischief's part but the peace it provided).

Harry had received several letters from Ron – his school friend. He was inviting him to his house with the odd name the Burrow, which Alamar said could not have been picked up without a reason given the boy's last name. Hermione, his other school friend, had also sent few letters, and Alamar had replied back inviting her to Darkstone Citadel, which Hermione had gracefully accepted.

"Finally!" – Harry exclaimed, putting down his quill. This was their last homework for the summer – Potions. Their potion master, Professor Snape, a very unpleasant teacher and head of Slytherin House, was quite meticulous in selecting homework for the summer, which of course meant that it was most difficult and unholy long. But it was over now.

"Yeah." – Alamar agreed, yawning. "Was that hard or what? I hope we got it right."

"We'll have Thant to review it." – Harry said. "Saptienna keeps saying how good he was in school."

"Oh, she's not the only one. You should hear mom as well." – Alamar smiled.

"It sounds like he's been the lady's man." – Harry said touchy.

"Someone referring to me?" – Thant asked while appearing on the threshold of Harry's room.

"No, not all." – Harry smiled.

"You, boys, are done?"

"Yeah, no more homeworks," – Alamar said then added. "We were though hoping you could see whether we've done well."

"Alright, give them here." – Thant uttered.

Thant took their homeworks sitting on Harry's bed. He read carefully their essays raising an eyebrow here and there, which was his way of keeping the boys on their toes. But they were so used to it that it didn't bother them anymore.

"Well..." – Thant began. "It could have been worse."

Harry and Alamar exchanged looks of total disbelief but said nothing expecting Thant to give up on his own.

"Alright, you got me." – Thant sighed defeated. "You've done well, actually, better than I've expected."

"Thanks!" – Harry said. "Snape should be satisfied."

"And if he isn't, I'll pay him a visit." – Thant added. "Or better yet I'll let your mother to do so."

"Yeah, he'll be thrilled." – Alamar added laughing.

"No, there will be no need." – Harry said quickly, trying not to imagine what Saptienna would do to poor Professor Snape.

"Right, now that you're done, care to join me on the grounds?" – Thant asked.

"What's on the grounds?" – Harry asked raising an eyebrow. Caution is one of the first things he had learnt living in this castle.

"You'll see." – Thant replied knowingly. At the threshold, he turned around to the boys. "Come on."

Sighing deeply, and being a little apprehensive, they followed him. The castle corridors were in their usual dim and cool way. They crossed the living room, and by the stairs stepped onto the grounds of the castle.

Solmyr castle was surrounded by vast and dense dark forests of fir and beech but a clear area of two acres where were the family crypts at the back of the castle, the experimental labs at the east corner; the greenhouse – clear on the sun side – due south, and the play grounds – north, where Thant and the boys came to.

Harry and Alamar's jaws fell. Thant had used the time when they were inside the castle to build a Quidditch field and stadium, not as big as Hogwart's but just as impressive. Harry's broomstick was put in the cupboard as soon as he had come back from school but now it was lying near the freshly painted locker room.

"Wow!" – Harry finally exclaimed.

Thant smiled. He led them to the locker room where they found uniforms. But what great looking uniforms they were – sparkling with silvery light like the evenfall, and at sunlight like a ribbon of diamond.

"Who plays with those?" – Harry pointed at the uniforms.

"We did a long time ago." – Thant replied closing eyes as remembering the times. "We were the Blackshire Spears but we've stopped playing, a long time ago."

"The Blackshire Spears?" – Alamar repeated like an echo with awe and respect. "The team was undefeated for seasons from 1765 to 1805."

"Yeah, those were the days." – Thant smiled broadly.

"But that would make you..." – Alamar did not complete his sentence. He knew that Harry's stepfather was old but not that old.

"This should make us a little over three hundred years old, well, not even close." – Thant continued his thought.

"Then how much?" – Harry asked, his curiosity taking over. He had always wanted to know but for some unknown reason Thant was avoiding to answer.

"Somewhere around there." – Thant said pointing at the tree lines. Harry and Alamar were taken aback for obviously they did not understand what Thant meant who only smiled satisfied at the confusion he had created.

Harry noticed his victory smile but promised himself that he would learn the truth one of these days. Harry knew that his foster parents were old, older than others, but how old he had no idea, now he had an idea. Thant looked just over forty, making him smile imagining that he had been leaving with such an old bat. But Harry liked Thant just the way he was. He had always wondered of his real age as Thant had deep knowledge. When some eight years ago – of his first conscious life, he had looked at him it felt like seeing in the antiquity of old times, deep knowledge and wisdom were hidden in the sparkling like firestorm red eyes (which usually were a shade of electric green when he was outside Solmyr Castle). He looked like a king of old straight from the pages of the history books, gentle but powerful.

"Would you like to try them?" – Thant threw Harry off his thoughts gesturing at the Quidditch robes.

"I would but it is doubtful we'll find something that would fit us." – Alamar said looking eagerly at the robes.

"Are you absolutely sure about this?" – Thant smiled knowingly. He handed them over two sets of robes that seemed would fit them perfectly.

"You made them?" – Harry looked at Thant expectantly.

"No, your mother did." – Thant replied. "She had finished them just yesterday. Go on, put them on."

With Thant insisting, it was difficult to say no, so Harry and Alamar willy-nilly had to put them on. As they were putting them on, they felt strange. It was like touching the past and yet being in the present. It was indeed an odd sensation because being in those robes made them feel great and extraordinary but mostly part of something greater than themselves, and weren't sure they deserved it.

"Now, you are the Spears." – Thant said solemnly. "You are the Spears that pierce the sky like lightning bolts and rays of starlight."

"Hugh, if you say so." – The boys said feeling strangely at the wrong place.

"Now, go and have fun." – Thant said lightly while leaving them.

Harry and Alamar looked at each other shrugging. Harry took his broom – the Nimbus Two Thousand. He mounted it, kicked hard of the ground and darted towards the sky. The feeling now was more than just great. It was difficult to describe. The robes of the Spears were extraordinary light, and Harry had the distinct impression that they were making him go faster, like he was a bird.

Alamar joined Harry shortly after. He was on the Silver Dart, his mother's faithful broomstick, one which was no longer made.

"Wow!" – Alamar exclaimed. "Is it just me or these robes are made especially for flying faster?"

"Yeah, I have the same feeling." – Harry nodded.

"Hey Nimbus." – The boys looked around, and on the opposite side of the field saw Cassie and Xsi on their newly bought broomsticks.

"Hey, Loki, Trivia." – Alamar called out.

Cassie and Xsi leaned on their broomsticks and like darts pierced the sky arriving shortly after near them.

"You guys want to play a bit?" – Cassie asked.

"Or are you too scared being beaten by girls?" – Xsi added.

"Two on two..." – Alamar looked at Harry questioningly, who just nodded. "Deal!"

And they played for hours until the sun had set down. In the twilight of the day, if anyone had looked up, he would have seen sparkling four stars playfully moving around the skies.

The next day, Harry received a letter from Ron. His father and his mother, and himself, would come to pick Harry for the week holiday at the Burrow by noon. Alamar had also received a letter from Hermione saying that she would arrive at the Leaky Cauldron in two days from where they will go to Darkstone Citadel as Alamar had said.

"Well, let me know how it goes in the Burrow." – Alamar said.

"Sure, as long as you behave with Hermione." – Harry said rolling up his eyes.

"Hey, who do you take me for?" – Alamar flared up, with a broad smile.

The boys laughed. They were now packing.

"Are you going to leave us, alone?" – Xsi asked while getting into Harry's room.

Harry looked up while closing his ready trunk. "Well, as I learnt it, there is not much place at the Burrow; besides you two are crazy for ten."

Xsi grunted while looking seemingly offended. Alamar who did not believe she was offended pretended to take pity on her, wrapping his arms around her, patting her gently on the back.

"Don't you cry..." – He said gently. "You can come to the Citadel with me and Athena."

"You're inviting disaster mate." – Harry remarked.

"I know." – Alamar admitted beamingly.



Xsi moved away from Alamar, and her eyes sparked with devilish light.

"Oh, you're dead mate." – Alamar said looking at Xsi's eye expression.

"Yeah, I know, all these years." – Harry shrugged, putting his father's invisibility cloak as a last addition to his trunk.

"Maybe, I could persuade Dad to send Cassie with you, Nimbus." – Xsi said finally.

Harry looked taken aback by this idea. "Oh, by Mortis, please don't." – He pleaded. "Anything but that."

Xsi laughed. "Alright." Harry visibly relaxed. "I shall think about it." – She added, and Harry's relaxed expression faded.

"Don't worry, Nimbus, I can take both of them." – Alamar bravely proposed.

"You are asking for it." – Harry warned.

Xsi was surprised and impressed at Alamar's attempt to save Harry some trouble but smiled. "We accept."

"Full disaster, mate, you've invited hell." – Harry laughed, as he knew Xsi wasn't that serious while making her threats to him. "Three girls, can you handle it?"

"We'll send you his will." – Xsi said while leaving the room.

"Oh, you're dead, Pluto, you're so dead." – Harry laughed.

Alamar lowered his gaze looking seemingly devastated, defeated then laugh sparkled. The boys laughed for quite a time. They just couldn't stop. This was how Thant found them half an hour later, still laughing with tears in their eyes. He looked up at them intrigued what would have prompted them to laugh so unstoppably.

"Nimbus, are you ready?" – Thant asked.

Harry and Alamar seized laughing at once. "Yeah, I am." Harry answered pointing at his trunk.

"Good, leave it here. Princess will take care of it."

"She is to come with me?" – Harry looked up at Thant.

"No, she would simply carry it to the Burrow."

"Oh, alright."

"Let's go! The Weasleys would be arriving soon." – Thant said looking at his watch.

The boys left their trunks and headed to the living room. Lady Saptienna was already there in her most official home robe – dark lilac with a little white around the waist. Thant was as usual in his home attire – sky-blue robe with silver fringes. Steward Moandor, well, he was as usual in his dirty red attire with the high white collar. He looked more like Dracula but this was normal, as he thought this brought him respect and fear but instead it was bringing only shame and laughter, especially from Lady Synca, Alamar's mother, as she usually was saying that he looked like stooped gremlin.

The fireplace, suddenly, roared in emerald green flames, and the figure appeared out of the flames. It was of a thin man going bald but the little hair he had was as red as any of the Weasleys. He wore long green robes, which were dusty and travel worn. Then with another roar appeared Mrs. Weasley, a short, plump, kind-faced woman. She looked around with a cautious but a little apprehensive look. It was just this morning when she learnt that the Solmyrs were living in Blackshire, and this name commanded fear in the wizard world. And last Ron came, Harry's school friend. He was freckled faced, red-haired with a long nose. He was in dark brown robes.

Thant with a flick of his wand dusted the guests' robes out of the inevitable dust then stepped forward offering to kiss the hand of Mrs. Weasley.

"Mrs. Weasley, Welcome to Solmyr Castle!"

Mrs. Weasley accepted handing her hand, which Thant kissed gently. Then Thant moved to Mr. Weasley handing out his hand, which Mr. Weasley shook.

"I am Lord Thant Solmyr, Harry's guardian."

"Arthur Weasley."

"This is my wife, Lady Saptienna Solmyr."

Arthur Weasley bent down gently kissing Saptienna's hand. "Mrs. Solmyr." Saptienna gave him a smile, flattered.

"These are my children – Cassie and Xsi." – Thant pointed at the girls standing beside Harry and Alamar.

"Nice to meet you, Ron told us all about you." – Mr. Weasley said then added turning to Harry. "And Harry as well. I'm very pleased to meet you."

"Me too." – Harry replied handing out his hand. "This is my friend Alamar Darkstone."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Darkstone, Ron's told us about you too." – Mr. Weasley said shaking Alamar's hand.

"Thank you, sir." – Alamar replied politely.

"Well, shall we have a drink?" – Lady Saptienna proposed.

The guests moved to the balcony where Moandor had prepared a special table with snacks and drinks.

"I understand you work in the ministry." – Thant said turning to Arthur Weasley.

"Yes, I do." – Arthur replied surprised.

"Which department?"

"Oh, I work in the department of Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office."

"Oh, a prestigious and important job." – Thant noticed visibly impressed. "It is nice to know people from this branch."

Mr. Weasley was at loss of words. He never would have taught anyone would be so impressed by the position he occupied.

"Are Ron and the twins your only children?" – Lady Saptienna, on other side of the table, asked.

"No, we have seven children – Ginny, Ron's little sister, she'll be attending Hogwarts this year; Ron, Fred and George, Percy – the next prefect in the family, Bill and Charlie. They've already graduated. Bill works at Gringotts' branch in Egypt breaking curses and Charlie is in Romania working with Dragons." – Mrs. Weasley explained, touched by the attention of her host.

"This is very impressive." – Lady Saptienna said. "Dear, did you hear?"

"Hear what?" – Thant looked from the other side of the table.

"Two of theirs sons work – one as curse breaker at Gringotts and the other in Rome..."

"No, it's actually Romania and he's working with Dragons." – Mrs. Weasley corrected.

"That's great. Curse breaker...hmm...we could use his services." – Thant said knowingly then turned to the confused looking Weasleys. "My brother lives in Cairo. He has a mansion there recently acquired. He has certain problems with the spells put around the house, mostly curses, so he asked me to find someone to break them but so far I've been unlucky in finding one."

"We could send an owl to Bill." – Arthur proposed.

"This would be great. I'll send my brother a letter to expect your son. I'll provide you later with the address." – Thant said delighted.

"Let's slip out." – Harry said while Thant was taking Ron's parents to the balcony. They headed to Harry's room. The girls headed to their room. "Oh, you can come too." Harry added seeing Xsi and Cassie going the other way.

"No need. We know you're going to do boy stuff." – Xsi winked at Harry.

"And we're going to do girl stuff." – Cassie added.

"Girls!" – Harry muttered. Alamar and Ron shrugged.

"So what have you two been doing these past weeks?" – Ron asked while entering and looking at Harry's room.

"Well, we've done our summer homeworks, already." – Alamar replied. "And then we played some Quidditch against Loki and Trivia, in the most unusual outfits."

"Meaning?"

"We were in the attires of the Blackshire Spears." – Alamar answered all beaming.

Ron looked up his eyes widening in awe, while he muttered. "The Blackshire Spears?"

"You know all about them?" – Harry asked.

"Are you kidding? The Blackshire Spears is the only Quidditch team that was undefeated for forty seasons in 1765 to 1805." – Ron said. "Where did you find these robes?"

"Apparently, Thant's great grand-father was the seeker of the Spears." – Harry lied before Alamar could dump them into the "you-know-what" by saying how old Thant had slipped he might be. He felt somehow that it would not be appropriate to mention it. Alamar looked strangely at Harry but added nothing.

"Wow! This is amazing." – Ron exclaimed. "Can I see those?"

"Sure. Let's go to the field."

"The field?" – Ron looked up.

"Yeah, Thant's latest surprise – a Quidditch field..."

"And stadium." – Alamar added.

Ron's eyes grew wider when he stepped onto the Quidditch field but not as wide and impressed when he laid eyes onto the Spears' Quidditch robes.

"Wow, authentic robes of the Spears, this is amazing." – He exclaimed, looking at the robes in awe and reverence. "Can I...can I touch one?"

Alamar gave Harry a wink.

"Sure, go ahead!" – Harry encouraged.

Ron was intoxicated with joy but he was cautious in touching the robes as he was afraid he might damage them. The sensation he felt was no different than Harry's and Alamar's though there is a difference in touching and actually wearing them.

Then they headed to Harry's room. Ron scanned with curiosity (understandable) Harry's room. It was spacious with a desk of dark oak, two mahogany chairs with clawed feet, a polished wardrobe in scarlet red with silver lines on both sides. Harry's bed was just as big and comfy as the one in Gryffindor tower. And there were also heavy dark green curtains covering the window.

Harry's room, as Ron noticed, was in the organized chaos he used to see at their room back at Hogwarts. But then there was a loud crack startling Ron. He looked for the disturbance and saw a house elf in a nice linen dress. She bowed at Harry.

"Master Harry, Lord Solmyr wishes your presence in the living room. You are sure to leave in a few minutes." – And then vanished again with a pop.

The boys went back to the living room where Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were waiting for them. The girls were already there.

"It was a pleasure meeting you!" – Molly said to her hosts. "Maybe we could do it again, right dear?"

Mr. Weasley who was looking at the pictures on the wall turned around. "Yes, of course...I mean when the week is over, you could probably come to take Harry from the Burrow and stay for dinner."

"We gracefully accept." – Lord Thant said courteously.

The flames in the fireplace suddenly gave a burst and Lady Synca jumped out of them.

"Thant, Saptienna!" – Synca greeted.

"Ah, Lady Synca, this is Arthur and Molly Weasley, Ron's parents." – Saptienna said introducing the Weasleys.

Lady Synca faced the Weasley gently bowing, handing out her hand. "Ah, yes, Alamar's told me all about this young man. I'm glad to meet his parents."

"Molly, Arthur, this is Alamar's mother, Lady Synca Darkstone." – Saptienna added.

"It's very nice to meet you." – Molly said while shaking hands with her.

"Alamar, dear, are you ready?" – Synca turned to Alamar.

"Yes, mother." – Alamar said. "My trunk is at..."

"Don't worry about your trunk, Alamar; Casper is going to bring it over." – Thant cut him off.

"In how many pieces?" – Harry wondered aloud making Cassie and Xsi laugh.

"That wasn't funny." – Alamar frowned but only managing to increase further the laughter, which he soon joined.

Ron and his parents were silently observing all this. They had no idea why this was so funny but then again they have never met Casper.

"Who is Casper?" – Molly asked Saptienna.

"Oh, he's one of the house elves." – Saptienna replied then added quickly with a smile. "He's a bit...clumsy at times."

"Well, sometimes..." – Synca interjected. "He is a recipe for disaster waiting to happen but we all love him much."

"Oh, I see." – Molly nodded understandingly.

"Well, Ron, Harry, are you two ready?" – Arthur asked turning to the boys.

"Yeah, we are." – Ron nodded.

"Well, Harry, it's rather simple. We'll just use the Floo Powder." – Arthur said preparing the powder.

"Dad, wait! Harry's never traveled with a floo powder before." – Ron remarked.

Harry moved forward, took a pinch of the powder from Mr. Weasley's bag, saying: "Actually, mate, I have," then went to hug Thant, Saptienna and his sisters. "See you in a week!"

Harry moved to the fireplace throwing the powder into the fireplace where it roared with emerald flames, stepped in and shouted clearly – "The Burrow", and vanished.

Harry appeared in the fireplace of a small and rather cramped kitchen. There was a scoured table wooden table and chairs in the middle where Harry sat down thirstily absorbing the surrounding with curiosity. He had never been in a wizard house before, the Solmyr Castle and Darkstone excluded of course, but they were Necromancers domain not wizard's.

The most intriguing part of the kitchen was an old clock with one hand and no numbers at all. Written around the edge were things like Time to make tea, time to feed the chickens, and You're late. The mantelpieces were deeply stack with all sorts of books the titles of some being Enchantment in Baking, One minute Feasts – It's Magic, or Charm your own Cheese. And the old radio beside the sink just announced that coming up was "Witching Hour, with the popular singer sorceress Celestine Warbeck."



Soon the flames in the fireplace flickered and roared, and Ron appeared. He was having his hands full of Chocolate Dreams, Saptienna's favorite chocolates, and the Blood Peppermint Drops of Dracula, Thant's favorites. Ron dropped the boxes on the table, and sat to relax on chair next to Harry.

"Oh, I see they couldn't resist." – Harry murmured.

"They do this all the time?" – Ron raised his eyebrows.

Harry only nodded but did not reply. He was observing the self cleaning dishes in the sink, clinking gently in the background.

Arthur and Molly Weasley arrived half an hour later. Their cheeks were quite flushed as though they had been jogging or dancing quite violently or as Harry suspected they had tried Thant's send off gift, the sparkled red wine, Mars Be with Thee!

"Ron, why don't you show Harry, around?" – Arthur suggested.

Ron stood up. "Sure, come on, Harry."

Harry followed Ron first outside. There were fields and clumps of trees. A village was visible down the hill.

"It's Ottery St Catchpole." – Ron said as Harry looked in the direction of the village.

Harry then turned his attention to the house. It must have been once a large stone pigpen, but extra rooms had been added here and there until it was several stories high and so crooked it looked as though it were held by magic (which, Harry logically assumed, it probably was). Four or Five chimneys were perched atop the red roof. A lopsided sign stuck in the ground near the entrance read: "THE BuRRow". Around the front door laid a very rusty cauldron and few rugged rubber boots. Some brown fat chickens were pecking their way through the yard.

"It's not much but it is home." – Ron said.

"It's wonderful." – Harry said imaging what is to live in a house where everything was held simply by magic.

"Harry!" – Harry and Ron wheeled around and saw the twins heading their way.

"It is so nice to see ya, mate." – Fred held out his hand, which Harry shook.

"What's up in your minds?" – Ron asked eyeing his brothers.

"Mom wants us to de-gnome the garden. Care to join us, Harry?" – George replied sulkily.

"I've never de-gnomed." – Harry confessed.

"Never? Blimey!" – Fred exclaimed.

"Well, Ickles Harry, it's as easy as cake." – George added. "Come, we'll show you."

Harry, after a glance at Ron, who nodded encouragingly, followed the twins. The garden was large, and as Harry noticed, it would have been a garden Saptienna would surely fall in love. It had plenty of weeds, and the grass needed cutting. There were also gnarled trees around the walls; some plants had never seen spilling from every flower bed, and a big green pond of frogs.

"You know," – Harry began. "Saptienna would surely fall in love with your garden."

"Really?" – Ron asked, looking stupefied at Harry.

"Oh, yeah, she adores such...great places of total chaos." – Harry said.

"So you've never seen a gnome?" – Ron asked while bending double down in peony bush.

"I wish I haven't but I have thanks to the disasters in the house." – Harry replied.

"Oh, yeah, the chaos makers..." – Ron nodded straightening up. "Well, meet our little friends."

"Geroff me! Geroff me!" – The gnome squealed.

The gnome was small and leathery looking, with a large, knobby, bald head exactly like a potato. Ron held it at arm's length as it kicked out at him with its horny little legs then grasped the gnome by the ankles turning it upside down.

"And to get rid of them, this is what you have to do!" – Ron said. He raised the gnome above his head and started to swing it in great circles like a lasso. Seeing Harry's confused look, Ron added. "You have to render them dizzy enough so they won't be able to find their way back to the gnomeholes."

He then let go of the gnome's ankles. It flew twenty feet into the air and fell with a thud on the other side of the hedge.

"Pitiful!" – George exclaimed. "I'll bet I can get mine past the stump."

Harry made the mistake to be merciful with the poor gnomes. He intended to drop the first over the hedge but the gnome sensing his weakness sank its razor sharp teeth into Harry's hand, and he had hard time jerking him off until...

"Wow, Ickles Harry, that's easy fifty feet." – Fred exclaimed impressed.

The air soon became thick with flying gnomes. Soon, the crowd of gnomes in the field over the hedge started walking gingerly away.

"They will be back. They liked it here." – Ron said as they watched Fred launch six gnomes into the air, and off the hedge. "Dad's too soft with them because he thinks they're funny."

Just then Molly appeared on the kitchen window, announcing. "Lunch is served."

They hurried through the garden and back to the house, sitting on the table, which was almost bent under the delicacies on it. For half an hour there was no sound other than the clinking of spoons and forks.

At the end of it, there was a diversion in the form of a small, redheaded figure in a long nightdress, which appeared in the kitchen, gave a small squeal, and ran out again.

"Ginny," – Ron said to Harry in an undertone. "My sister, she's been talking about you all summer."

"Yeah, she'll probably want your autograph, Harry." – Fred added with a grin.

"Let's go up. I have to show you my room." – Ron said.

They slipped out of the kitchen and down a narrow passage to an uneven staircase that zigzagged up through the house. On the third floor landing, there was a door ajar. Harry just caught a pair of bright brown eyes staring at him before it closed with a snap.

"Ginny." – Ron said. "You don't how weird it is for her to be this shy. You can't shut her up normally..."

They climbed two more flights until they reached a door with peeling paint and a small plaque saying RONALD'S ROOM.

Harry stepped in, his head almost touching the sloping ceiling, and blinked. At first, it felt like being in a furnace: every inch of the walls was in violent shade of orange. It took Harry several minutes to realize that Ron had covered the walls with posters of the same seven wizards and witches all wearing orange robes, carrying broomsticks and waving energetically.

"Your Quidditch team?" – Harry blinked again.

"Yeah, the Chudley Cannons," – Ron nodded, pointing at the orange bedspread, which was emblazoned with two giant C's and a speeding cannonball. "Ninth in the league."

School spell books were stacked untidily in the corner next to the pile of comics, all of which seemed to feature The Adventures of Martin Miggs, the Mad Muggle. Ron's wand was lying atop a fish tank full of frog spawn on the windowsill, next to his fat grey rat – Scabbers, who was snoozing in a patch of sun.

Harry looked up the tiny window seeing a couple of gnomes sneaking back to the garden then turned around facing Ron, who was watching him almost nervously, as though expecting his opinion.

"It's a bit small." – Ron said quickly. "Not like the room you have at the castle but..."

"Ron, it is great. This is the greatest house, I've been into, not that I have been in many houses. Leaving in a castle is not the same thing." – Harry cut him off.

Ron's ears went pink.

Hermione and her parents entered into the Leaky Cauldron, and there by the bar sat Alamar and Synca Darkstone. Lady Synca stood up and greeted the Grangers while Alamar served the drinks; some were fuming other looked oddly like beer.

"Hermione!" – Alamar greeted.

"Alamar, what's this?" – Hermione pointed at the pint.

"Oh, this is an excellent drink. It is called butter-beer." – Alamar explained. "Here, try it."

"Thank you. Where is Harry?"

"He is with Ron at the Burrow."

"That's great." – Hermione took a gulp at the beer. It was the most extraordinary drink she had ever drunk. "This is..."

"I know." – Alamar nodded. "I felt the same way the first time I tasted it."

"How was your summer?"

"So far, excellent." – Alamar replied. He was about to say something else when a sudden noise made him splutter the rest of his beer.

It was as usual the chaos makers – Loki and Trivia. They had appeared a bit loudly and noisily out of the fireplace. Actually, Cassie had fallen over her sister while exiting the flames; they've gone one after the other. Xsi was on the floor laughing while Alamar was cleaning his clothes.

"You startled me, you bringers of..." – He flared up.

"Delight, joy, happiness..." – Cassie said still laughing.

"Friendship, undying but faithful love." – Xsi added standing up.

"Yeah right." – Alamar's anger had not yet cooled down. Hermione only smiled. She was also startled by the very effective entrance of the Solmyr sisters.

"Girls, behave." – Lady Synca said.

"Sorry." – The sisters apologized.

"Mom, Dad, this is Cassie and Xsi, Harry's step sisters." – Hermione introduced the troublemakers to her parents.

"It is nice to meet some friends of our daughter." – Mrs. Granger said.

"As it is to meet Hermione's mom and dad." – Cassie replied courteously.

"Very nice and polite young girls." – Mr. Granger observed.

"Alamar, take your friends to the citadel." – Synca said turning to her son.

"And the luggage?" – Mrs. Granger inquired concerned.

"Don't worry about it. My house elf, Elliot, will take care of it." – Synca reassured.

"Well, after you, ladies!" – Alamar said then stressed with a low but firm voice, looking especially at the troublemakers. "One after the other, not all at once."

"Sure." – Cassie nodded.

"You first, sis, this time." – Xsi insisted.

Cassie bowed then turned to the fire. Pinched in some floo powder, stepped into the fire and shouted: Darkstone Citadel, and vanished

with a fussing noise. A minute later, Xsi followed. She wanted to be sure this time. Hermione followed few minutes later, Alamar was last.

Hermione felt like being sucked down a giant drain. She seemed to be spinning very fast – the roar was almost deafening. She tried to keep her eyes open but the whirl of green flames made her head spin. She was spinning and spinning, seeing streams of fireplaces and snatching glimpses of rooms beyond. She closed her eyes wishing all this would stop and then...she fell onto cold stone face forward.

Dizzy and a bit bruised, covered in soot, someone helped her get on her feet. She looked up – it was Alamar, all beaming, coming from the emerald fire behind her. "Welcome to Darkstone Citadel," – he said cheerfully.

Hermione looked around with curiosity. She was in a vast room, probably the living room, as there was a sofa and old but fashionable armchairs with a small crystal table between them. The opposite wall, there were just a few paintings, but unlike the wizard ones those were not moving. They were depicting various landscapes. One in particular caught Hermione's eye – it was a lake whose surface was like polished glass reflecting the gently flickering lights but it was made in such way that although the picture was not moving anyone observing would have sworn it was. Soft but playful light diffused from the torches on the walls was dancing on the floor, giving the citadel almost ethereal outlook to the living room.

Alamar led the girls through a corridor in the far corner of the living room, also lit with same fire torches. There were no pictures on the corridor walls instead it looked like the walls were covered with carpets of dark barely glittering silk.

They reached a spiral staircase of which they climbed two floors up. Alamar brought them in a circular room with two staircases, one on the right and other on the left. It looked remarkably like the Gryffindor Common Room.

"These are your rooms." – Alamar said pointing the left staircase.

"And what's on the other side?" – Cassie asked.

"The bathrooms." – Alamar said.

"Great."

"You have four rooms to choose from." – Alamar added. "So there is enough place for everyone."

"You are going to stay with us?" – Xsi eyed him suspiciously.

"No, my room is on the other side of the citadel, in the other tower so don't worry." – Alamar said with a smile then added. "Besides, Mom is not going to let me be in such close proximity with three girls."

"Yeah, bad boy!" – Cassie laughed.

Alamar sighed deeply. "Yeah, I can only dream."

At this comment they all laughed.

"Well, I'll be downstairs preparing dinner." – Alamar announced.

"You?" – Xsi sounded surprised.

"Why is it sounding so impossible?" – Alamar countered looking seemingly offended.

"No, it is fine." – Cassie said looking straight at her untactful sister. "See you, ah, when?"

"In an hour or so." – Alamar replied as he was exiting the circular room.

"Oh, okay, see ya." – Cassie added then attacked Xsi at once. "Could you shut it for once? He is trying to be nice."

"Oh, you shut it. I was just surprised. I mean how often do you hear a boy cooking, especially when he is twelve and his mother is around?"

"Well, not very often." – Cassie admitted.

Xsi suddenly realized that Hermione was silently following their banter.



"Oh, sorry, Hermione, we forgot you were here." – Xsi turned apologetically to her. "It must be really annoying hearing two..."

"Pinheads ducking it out." – Cassie finishing her sentence.

"No, actually, it is very educational." – Hermione observed.

"Sis, I think she is making fun of us." – Xsi remarked, devilish lights sparkling in her eyes.

"Yeah, I would agree." – The three girls laughed because the situation was indeed quite comic.

"Who's first in the showers?" – Xsi asked.

"I am then Hermione and you're last." – Cassie announced.

"Why I last?"

"This would be because you stay there for like an eternity. " – Cassie replied. "That's why!"

"That's not true." – Xsi objected.

"It is." – Cassie told Hermione in an undertone. "Once she's inside it's impossible to drag her out." Hermione chuckled.

While Cassie had gone first, Hermione went to choose a room. The rooms were all cozy, the beds nice and soft. Hermione choose one that was facing east, which had a nice soft carpet on the floor, and glittering stars on the ceiling. There was another painting on the wall like the one she saw down in the living room. This one of course depicted the setting of the sun that was bathing a snow peak. The colors were so vivid that made the frame look like a window to another world. Hermione lay on the bed and was sure to fall asleep. But Cassie soon tapped on her door.

"I'm done." – She said while rubbing her hair dry.

"So fast?" – Hermione exclaimed unbelievably.

"Well, yeah..." – Cassie smiled and vanished.

The bathroom was of nice variegated marble tiles. It was softly lit by a splendid candled filled chandelier. The wash-stand was on the right and on the left near the bath-tub hanging were some soft bathrobes. Hermione undressed and sat in the bath-tub. Four silver tabs stood around the edges of the tub, each with a differently colored jewel set into its handle.

Hermione turned on the first one, which gushed thick pink foam mixed with water that gently caressed her skin then she turned it off, and turned the second one on. It produced ice-white bubbles the size of giant Christmas eggs. The third one sent softly perfumed magenta clouds hovering over the surface. And the last one was a big surprise as its jet bounced of the water surface in small arcs. As the tub was now full, Hermione turned off the tabs, and started enjoying herself.

She stayed in the bath for nearly an hour enjoying the bubbles she had never experienced or dreamed of. She let her mind wonder in the unknown space of dreams where I can assure you there are no books. Then she put on one of the bathrobes whose softness make you feel of puffy clouds and headed to her room where she found her luggage, delivered just a minute before she went to the bath by Elliot, the house elf. Remembering that Xsi was to be next she passed by her room.

"I'm done." – She said standing in the door frame.

Xsi was not alone. With her was Cassie who looked at Hermione with a mixture of shock and surprise.

"Wow!" – Cassie said finally. "You know, Hermione, I think I wrongly accused Xsi at staying long in the bath. It seems she has now good competition."

"It's not like that." – Hermione's cheeks went red. "I've just never been in a wizard bath such as this."

"Oh, excuses, yeah, you're just like Xsi." – Cassie said even more convinced of what she was saying. "She found the same excuse the first time."

"You know, it is not our problem that you're incapable of enjoying the wondrous place called bath." – Xsi reprimanded her.

Hermione smiled at this exchange of civilities. "You two never stop, do you?"

"No." – They replied in unison then started laughing again.

"Alright, I am going in." – Xsi said still laughing.

"Yeah, get ready for at least few millennia." – Cassie couldn't contain herself.

Hermione went to dress up. She then descended to the circular room where Cassie most unusually was having an interesting occupation. She was arranging a chessboard.

"You play?" – Cassie looked questioningly at Hermione.

"No but Ron and Harry do."

"Yeah, Alamar as well, they are quite good as you well remember." – Cassie reminded of last year's challenge into the dungeons where they passed by McGonagall's giant chess. "But I do hope one day to be able to beat them."

"Why?"

"Imagine the humiliation of losing to a girl." – Cassie made one of her mischievous smiles.

"Yeah, it would be." – Hermione agreed.

"Hermione, I've wanted to ask you..."

"What?"

"What do you do for...fun? I mean besides being stuck in a book."

"Ah, well..." – Hermione stuttered while becoming all red again. "I like...ah...going to the mountains, watching television, and learning about the history of different countries."

"Well, there is nothing to be ashamed of," – Cassie observed. "It was a simple question. There is no need of becoming a red tomato. It's not like I'm asking you which boy you want to date."

"Well, you are a witch. I mean you're not muggleborn." – Hermione stammered.

"So? Does it mean I would be mean or that I would laugh at you?" – Cassie looked at her, a bit offended by what she was implying.

"No, of course, not, I mean it is difficult when one has to prove himself." – Hermione replied quickly realizing how it must have sounded.

"Yeah, say that again, I have Harry at home." – Cassie said and Hermione chuckled. "Must see him when he's trying to prove himself before mother, she is a bit strict. Well not only a bit, actually quite a lot."

"Are you girls ready?" – Alamar's voice came from the stairs.

"Not yet, Xsi is still swimming in the bath." – Cassie replied.

"Oh." – Alamar sighed. "Well, dinner is ready. I'll be waiting in the living room."

"You come up and tell us this. There is no need to hide. It's not like we're naked or something." – Cassie winked at Hermione.

"I don't want to intrude." – Alamar said.

"You're not." – Hermione reassured him.

"Wait and see." – Cassie whispered.

Alamar almost came into sight when Cassie said loudly: "Oh, Hermione would you, please, pass me over my panties." Alamar froze in his steps the turned abruptly around but stumbled and fell down the stairs making loud puffing noise.

"See. Boys!" – Cassie grinned.

Hermione looked a bit disapprovingly but could not resist a tiny grin.

Three hours later, Xsi finally got out of the bath. Cassie announced that she had beaten all previously known records. Hopefully, Xsi dressed up quickly. The girls went down to the living room where they found Alamar snoozing on one of the armchairs.

"Good evening!" – They said making Alamar jump.

"Oh, you were asleep, so sorry." – Xsi apologized though it was clear they are not sorry at all.

"Well, if the ladies are ready," – Alamar retorted. "We could have dinner, finally, before the clock announces the arrival of the new day."

"The ladies are ready." – Cassie echoed, bowing gently.

"Follow me!"

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 17

### Summer Stories

Life in the Burrow was different from Solmyr Castle. Harry could get up anytime he wanted to, everywhere was nice and warm, and no spiders. But the Burrow did resemble the castle in many aspects – not too much dust but in sufficient quantities, strange noises, which Harry was quickly explained came from the ghoul in the attic. The creature was throwing pipes and howling as soon as everything was getting too quiet. The small explosions from the twins' bedroom were considered something pretty normal. Even the mirror over the kitchen mantelpiece managed to scare Harry when it shouted – "Tuck your shirt in, scruffy." But what really impressed Harry was neither the ghoul nor the talking mirror: the people living in this house were so down to earth. They were warm, caring and amusing (not that in Solmyr castle his family was not – don't get me wrong though I'm sure it did sound this way).

Mrs. Weasley was forcing him to eat at least four times the usual meal. Mr. Weasley was taking the opportunity to explore everything Harry knew of the muggles and life in the castle, which was a very interesting and fascinating subject for obvious reasons, at least for him.

One morning, he stumbled again into the little red-haired sister of Ron's – Ginny. She seemed quite shy and every time Harry would walk where she was she would drop whatever she was holding or turn red as a reddish, and run away as quickly as possible. What Harry understood for Ginny was that it had been indeed difficult to shut her down but around him she was speechless (ah, heroes, it is never easy).

This particular morning however she had nowhere to run since Harry was standing at the only way out.

"Good morning." – Harry greeted. Ginny only nodded her eyes scanning the immediate area for hiding place. None was available.

"Hi." – Harry heard her feeble answer.

Harry stood still waiting for Ginny to say something. The sun had just come up on the horizon. Its rays gently fell on Ginny's hair that

took the color of hot lava, and it was in this moment that Harry saw her in a different light. It was an awkward moment.

The sun rays touched her face making Harry see she was beautiful, her bright brown eyes scanning with childish curiosity. Something deep in Harry was touched. It was an undefined feeling Harry could not explain. He stood still as though struck by the body-bind curse.

"Ah, I..." – Harry stammered. "I should be..." Harry put away the clothes he intended to be washed. "I...well see you around." And he got out as quickly as possible as though afraid that staying any longer the magic would not let him go. And the rest of the day was otherwise quiet.

The next morning Harry woke to find that he was alone in the room. They left him oversleep. He got up, dressed up and went to find his friend. Ron was in the backyard helping his mother with the fattened chickens.

"Harry."

"Ron."

"Are you alright?" – Ron asked.

"I'm fine." – Harry said. "Some Quidditch?"

"Love to." – Ron replied excitedly then looked at his mother for approval. Molly just nodded. "Let's go!"

They went to Ron's room to pick up their brooms. On the way they bumped into the twins who were also excited about the idea. Ten minutes later, the boys were headed up the hill where the Weasleys had a paddock surrounded by trees that blocked it from view of the village below and as long they did not fly very high.

Of course, they took turns on flying Harry's Nimbus Two Thousand as it was easily the best broom. Ron's old Shooting Star was often outstripped by the passing butterflies. They couldn't use real Quidditch balls as it would be quite awkward if they were to fall to the village so they used apples and other fruits, which they threw at each other.

They played late until it was barely visible then headed back to the Burrow. At dinner, Ron's older brother Percy whom Harry was seeing only at meals was exploring with interest a letter. The letter happened to be from Hogwarts.

Their letters had not yet arrived, which was a bit strange though there was no need for worry. Instead, the letters arrived the next morning.

"Have our letters arrived?" – Ron inquired first thing in the morning.

"Yes, they've just arrived." – Mr. Weasley answered handing him over his then turned to Harry. "Harry, yours is here too. Seems Dumbledore knows you're here – doesn't miss a trick that man."

He passed Harry an envelope with yellowish parchment, addressed in green ink. The letter was telling him to catch Hogwarts Express as usual from King's Cross station on September first. Included was also the list of the new books for the coming year.

Second Year Students Will Require:

The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2 by Miranda Goshawk

Break with a Banshee by Gilderoy Lockhart

Gadding with Ghouls by Gilderoy Lockhart

Holidays with Hags by Gilderoy Lockhart

Travels with Trolls by Gilderoy Lockhart

Voyages with Vampires by Gilderoy Lockhart

Wanderings with Werewolves by Gilderoy Lockhart

Year with the Yeti by Gilderoy Lockhart

Fred, who had finished his own list, took a peek at Harry's.

"You've been told to acquire Lockhart's books too, ah?" – Fred said. "The New Defense against the Dark Arts teacher must be a fan – I'll bet it's a witch."



"Those won't come cheap..." – George said throwing a quick look at his parents. "Lockhart's books are too expensive..."

"Well we'll manage." – Molly said though she looked worried. "I expect we'll pick up a lot of Ginny's things secondhand."

Harry looked surprised but then remembered last year on the platform of King's Cross the conversation between Molly and Ginny.

"So you will be starting at Hogwarts this year, too?"

Ginny only nodded blushing to the roots of her hair, and put her elbow in the butter dish. Fortunately everyone was too distracted to notice but Harry as something startlingly looking like grey duster hit the window.

"Errol!" – Ron exclaimed, jumping to the window, taking out gently the exhausted bird, and extracting the letter from under its wing. "A letter from Hermione, he's got it."

He carried Errol to a perch just inside the back door and tried to stand him but he dropped off it so Ron put him on the draining board instead, "Pathetic." Then he ripped off open Hermione's letter and read it.

"Dear Ron and Harry,

We're having cool time in the citadel. I know it's hard to believe coming from me but Alamar's Mom is really cool, and having Harry's sisters is not only a recipe for disaster but a source for fun, I have come not to expect.

But between all the funs, we've managed to complete all homeworks. We've got really excellent help from Lady Synca. And the wonderful stories she has not to mention the extensive library, "Of course," – Ron snorted.

We've decided to go to Diagon Alley tomorrow to buy the new books. Why don't we meet there?

Err... I guess then we can discuss all something else there is to... Love from Hermione"

"Well, that fits perfectly." – Molly said starting to clear the table. "We can all go then and get yours things."

Harry and Ron left the kitchen and straight to Ron's room. The last sentence of the letter suggested that the chaos makers had something in mind. Ron had winked at Harry while reading that last part.

"What is it?" – Harry asked as soon as they were alone in the room.

"Well, there is a part I didn't want to read in front of the others." – Ron replied knowingly.

"And what are they up to?"

"Well it reads," – Ron cleared up his throat.

"I guess then we can discuss some points for the future of the Capers. Loki and Trivia have some interesting ideas (well I have too),

"Disturbing," – Harry exclaimed, "What have they done to Hermione I wonder."

"Indeed." – Ron agreed. "Hmm, it continues: Alamar also contributed. I'm personally excited but you'll see. I'll say we'll get the chance to make a difference. Love Hermione."

"It sounds..."

"Outright crazy, yeah, I know." – Ron nodded in agreement.

"Yeah, and totally unbelievable...Hermione's siding with them, I have no idea what they could have done to her."

"Yeah it is a mystery, hopefully for the good." – Ron suggested.

"I sure hope so." – Harry said crawling in his bed. "Good night."

Harry felt fast asleep but a strange, exciting dream protruded from the depths of his subconscious mind. The weather was dark and stormy. He was in the forbidden forest looking for something, and then suddenly a thunder struck illuminating the immediate area. He

saw shadows of big, hairy and clumsy creatures with eight or more legs carrying a body with red hair and straight open brown eyes. The lips of the body moved and silently saying: "Help me!" Harry sensed anger running through his veins, and raised his wand – a lightening engulfed the creatures and the body fell. Harry caught it just in time and then something great happened. It was so pleasing and so exciting that words alone can not describe it. And then Harry woke up briskly.

He looked around – no forbidden forest – just the window of Ron's room. It was still dark outside. Harry was sweating, his heart racing. He leaned forward for a glass of water. He drank it quickly and fell back to sleep not knowing what surprise the next day will present him with.

The moon has just risen over the horizon bathing its light over Darkstone Citadel. Its towers like silver spears glowed ghostly but inside everything appeared to be calm. The dim torches were throwing pale light on the stone cold floor, and yet four figures were still awake. They were standing in the observatory on the roof of the South tower; their eyes slightly phosphoric were shining like small stars.

The night sky was so full of stars like no other night before that. It felt like the stars have come up to greet them all.

"It's so beautiful." – Hermione exclaimed while absorbed by the view.

"Yeah, it is so quiet." – Loki agreed.

"Thanks Pluto." – Trivia said.

Alamar just nodded saying nothing but understood. These past days have been trying even for him, being with one girl is difficult enough but with three even further. But he had come to adjust to their different personalities.

Hermione was the calm one, and as Thant used to say those that are calm are the most dangerous but she was the voice of reason and sensibility. Cassie or Loki, well, she was the rebellious of the group, the prankster spirit, and yet she was gentle and carrying but merciless when attacked. Trivia, or Xsi, well she was something

between Hermione and Cassie, calm at times but just as rebellious and stubborn.

This night, Alamar had taken them on the tower to see the night for what it was. It was not darkness to be feared but something to embrace for it was something just as beautiful as the day, or at least something with beauty of its own, untouched and untamed. Why you may ask – well for Alamar the night was the best part of the day. Where everything laid silent, calm, where tranquility ruled, for only then you can see its true color, its true spirit.

You can say that the past days had changed everyone. They've learnt to live together, to accept everyone with their faults and their goods, with their differences. Even Hermione has come to accept what Loki and Trivia were, not to be disapproving of their way of life, way of doing things. You will say that the time spent is not enough to come to understand, to know one but there are exceptions to the rule. The bond between the girls has grown significantly during this time. Perhaps, it is the Citadel itself, perhaps the fact that they were living just one room across that changed all that, perhaps something else.

As they were standing enjoying the view, Lady Synca, Alamar's mother, came to them with a tray of small delicacies.

"Thank you!" – Hermione said while taking the enchanted cookie. It was believe it or not the specialty of Elliot, the resident house elf. It is an interesting item to consume. It smells just like any other normal cocoa cookie but being enchanted has its own unusual properties – the taste. Oh, the taste of the cookie, well that is something. As it touches your lips, it starts to melt, and you can definitely feel every single ingredient with its own blend and aroma. As it comes to your tongue, it thaws spreading from one sensible part of your mouth to the other, unleashing the flavor, making you enjoy every single bit, and well you can also feel the love with which the cookie was made. So this is truly an enchanted cookie. Cool ain't it?

"Is there a star in the sky that is lonely?" – Loki asked louder than she intended to.

Lady Synca looked at her – this girl, so intuitive. "No, the stars are never alone. They are the beginning, they are the end but never alone."

Trivia hugged her sister. She was in a strange mood lately. Always seeming to ask these serious questions, something was definitely bothering her but at times she wouldn't let even her know what.

Hermione was also surprised by Loki's question. Loki, who was always vivid and playful, now seemed distant, just like the stars on the night sky. It was not normal for a twelve year old girl to have such profound thoughts and mood.

Alamar simply looked at his mother shrugging slightly. A week ago, those three girls drove him crazy. Harry was right – he had invited hell. But now he thought no more like that. Sometimes, you have to cross even through hell in order to reach for heavens.

Simply – four days ago:

After the girls made him wait for five hours before joining him for dinner he had prepared with such care he was exhausted, and a bit frustrated. Then they came. At first he did not pay attention to them but then he had noticed – how they were dressed: Hermione in pale blue gown, Xsi in white silk, and Cassie, Cassie was the star – in vivid rose red gown with golden stripes, her eyes sparkling playfully.

They had dinner outside on the terrace. On the long ornate table, with silver plates and cutlery, gently floating in the air, white candles were throwing soft light. The dishes prepared spread the sweet aroma of care and love. He seated them – Cassie and Xsi on the sides, Hermione at the head, while he served them each, like true gentleman of past.

The dinner was quiet for the first ten minutes. Then his mother came, and all hell broke loose. Lady Synca was always like that. She enjoyed a good talk whether she was with adults or children; it made no difference to her.

"Ladies." – Synca said sitting down while Alamar hurried to serve his mother.

"Lady Synca." – Xsi hurried to be courteous.

"Oh, Xsi, only Synca, there is no need of formalities." – Synca cut her off quickly. "Alamar, dear, would you bring the rosebud wine?"

Alamar froze dead in his tracks. It was apparent he wasn't thrilled at this proposal.

"Alamar?" – Synca repeated looking intently at his son.

"Yes, mother." – Alamar sighed heavily, and disappeared inside.

"Was it a busy day, ladies?" – Synca asked while taking on the meat balls. "Before coming here of course?"

"Yes, Harry and Ron were doing everything possible of avoiding us." – Xsi replied.

"That's not true." – Cassie disagreed.

"Yes, it is."

"No, it isn't. They went doing boy stuff while we went doing girl stuff."

"Such as?" – Hermione couldn't resist asking.

"Well, believe it or not we went to prepare our luggage, and some dresses, such as these," – Cassie pointed at her dress all beaming, "Then..."

"Then we went looking for Casper and Kaiser." – Xsi finished her sentence. "They were supposed to help us with some. Err...ingredients."

"Explosive or otherwise?" – Synca asked smiling broadly.

"Something like it." – Cassie said shyly.

"I see."

"And then we started thinking about...err..."

"About?" – Hermione raised an eyebrow.

"Well," – Xsi inserted diplomatically. "We have our thoughts, well, some ideas about the coming year."

"Yes, we do." – Cassie nodded. "We have to be prepared for the ongoing war with the twins."

"War? What war? Whose twins?" – Synca asked trying to understand.

"They declared war on the Weasley's twins – Fred and George. I guess they pushed them a bit." – Alamar answered, returning with the rosebud wine.

"Well, they did. No one..."

"We know." – Alamar cut her off. "There is no need to let us into this."

"But Pluto you are already in." – Cassie retorted.

"I know dear heavens." – Alamar made a grimace mimicking severe pain. "But it is no reason to hear about your devilish plans. Whatever you're up to, keep me out of it."

"Dear, Pluto, you begin to sound just like Nimbus." – Xsi observed with a loving tone.

"Well, I do have some sense." – Alamar noted.

"Anyway," – Cassie continued. "We started planning the year of war with the twins, plus we have some other ideas about the future of the Capers."

Lady Synca was listening at this with interest. Three twelve year's old girls and her boy were speaking of war, pranks war, as she gathered with such enthusiasm she hadn't heard in a while – actually since the time of the Marauders. Her younger niece that had attended Hogwarts some decades ago has spoken highly of Hogwarts notorious group called the Marauders – the trouble makers. They were four Gryffindors, one of which was from the famous house of Black, and one that unexpectedly had ended in Gryffindor. The Marauders were at the center of every disaster and major prank in the school of magic. And now her own son seemed to be part of another generation of pranksters, along with Cassie, Xsi, Harry and even Hermione, which was to be honest a bit difficult to believe.

"The Capers?" – Synca looked questioningly. "Strange name – which of you came up with it?"

"We all did." – Hermione quickly answered.

"Oh, don't be so modest Athena." – Cassie inserted with almost an innocent smile. "Hermione was nice of naming us, after many unsuccessful attempts we made to come up with a name."

"Alright, I did give a suggestion." – Hermione admitted. "But Harry insisted we needed a name."

"Well, yes, he did." – Cassie said all beaming. "Then we started our existence with some harmless jokes."

"Yeah indeed, you turned Snape into a female pop star." – Alamar recalled with a smile on his face.

"You turned Professor Severus Snape into a woman?" – Synca exclaimed.

"Well, yeah." – Xsi nodded shyly.

"How?"

"We had some help." – Cassie answered cautiously.

"I see – the Polyjuice Potion?"

"Yes." – Cassie nodded. "On Halloween."

"Oh, so that's why you needed it?" – Synca recalled. "And I gather you introduced it into his food, right?"

"Yeah, with dark fumes."

"Very impressive but how did you do it? This is not up to your level of magic."

"We had some help."

"I see – Casper and Kaiser?"



"Well..." – Cassie trailed off.

"Don't worry, Cassie, I'm not going to tell anyone." – Synca reassured her. "I was merely curious."

"Anyway, then we set up a Slytherin that has been bothering Harry ever since he got at school." – Cassie continued.

"Set up your own housemate – vengeful." – Synca noticed impressed.

"And then we turned onto Ron's brothers." – Xsi added.

"Yeah." – Cassie nodded. "They declared war on us and..."

"They most certainly did not." – Hermione cut her off.

"Yes, they did." – Cassie shook stubbornly her head. "They did and ..."

"Yeah, right." – Hermione retorted. "You did probably just because you heard from Ron that they were pranksters and you wanted to see whose better."

"My, Hermione, you sound like you're defending them." – Xsi shot ironically.

"I did not say that and you are going to hear me do it. Obviously you heard them saying something, which you misunderstood, misinterpreted, or even worse twisted in such a way so it could serve your dark prankster needs, or probably this blinded your prankster virtue because some two boys were beating in the area you proclaim to be number one. So your obsession feelings were hurt and you imagined this insult they've supposedly offended you with so you can have the excuse." – Hermione flared up with such heat Alamar had not come to expect from her.

"Twisted things?" – Xsi stuttered unbelieving.

"Obsession feelings?" – Cassie stammered shocked.

"Yes, you're." – Hermione stressed out. "As I was saying you invented all this just to have the excuse and..."

"That's not true." – Xsi objected. "They did start first."

"Sure, keep telling yourself this – you might actually believe in it."

"Oh, you..." – Xsi was at loss of words.

"Me what?"

But it was Cassie that replied. She instantly flared up. Her eyes were flashing dangerously.

"You have no idea what you are talking about, you ungrateful git."

"Ungrateful git?" – Hermione's eyes widened.

"Yeah, ungrateful, you are." – Cassie confirmed, her rage rising up. "You know nothing about this. Besides, who the hell are you? What are you besides a know-it-all bookworm that is incapable of having any kind of fun or joy? Always by the rules, - oh the rules this, the rules that – bloody boring, that's what you are."

"What?" – Hermione exclaimed getting redder.

"You heard me." – Cassie shot. "Oh..."

"Girls, please!" – Synca tried to intervene.

"For your information, I can have perfect fun and I don't need the likes of you to give me any lessons." – Hermione shot back angrily.

"The likes of us?" – Cassie's eyes widened.

"Yes, the likes of you, you heard me well. You can obviously do one thing only – pranks for you are incapable of doing anything else." – Hermione shot with usual supremacy in her voice though her anger did go further. "Really, when was the last time that you really had fun that did not involve a joke or a prank? Perhaps only in the belly of your mother where you were calm (one can only hope) but doubtful. You're good at pointing fingers only like those two house elves. Oh,

it was Casper and Kaiser who pushed us into the troublemaker business, boo – how cute."

"You know nothing about them." – Cassie's voice trembled with anger.

"I know enough. You don't have to be a bookworm genius to figure this one out. If they were really pushing all you had to do is refuse but no," – Hermione continued with annoying supremacy. "No, you had to take on the only person that could not defend himself – Harry. I don't really know how he continues to put up with you so tell me princess what are you good at besides the obvious deficiencies?"

Cassie was now at loss of words although it was plainly obvious she was angry while Hermione continued to look at her and Xsi with almost arrogant supremacy and just as flared up.

"Desert is served." – Alamar intervened before the situation escalated any further.

Fortunately for Alamar, the girls were satisfied only with looking murderously at each other. There were no further word altercations between them but the talks for tonight were over. Alamar did try to reestablish conversation but it did not work. The girls did answer but with single words. He was happy when the meal was over. He first escorted Hermione back to her room and then came back for Cassie and Xsi. And he only hoped that the girls won't try to kill each other.

The first day began good and ended bad. Alamar couldn't really understand the girls. Everything was fine and they seemed fond of each other at first but then all hell broke loose. It was like they were bottling their feelings and then they just let it all go. He wondered since when this bottling had begun but then simply shrugged – girls what can one expect – trouble – nothing more. Harry did warn him. He should have listened.

Alamar reached his bed. It was an unexpectedly tiresome day. He just hoped that not all remaining days would be such, and closing his eyes fell fast asleep.

The next morning, the sun was high in the horizon when Alamar finally woke up. He looked at the time and gasped. He had slept for over ten hours and no one bothered him and although he was happy

about it, it was still highly unusual. He dressed up quickly and straight to the kitchen. He made two big sandwiches and headed for the garden for he enjoyed eating his breakfast in the garden, even when it was raining.

It was a beautiful day as Alamar noticed. He sat on a round rock in the middle of the garden near the big oak. From this position he had a view of the surroundings – the high fence encompassing the garden and the citadel, the entrance to the cemetery up north, the pool – south and the front gate – east. Everything was quiet but there was no sign of his mother or of his guests. He wondered where they could be and knowing well his mother – the logical place for them to be was the library in the back garden.

Finishing his sandwiches, Alamar headed to the back garden, and of course it is there that he found his mother and Hermione but not Cassie and Xsi.

"Good morning." – He greeted.

"Good morning? It's already noon, dear." – Synca remarked.

"Well, yeah, so?"

"Never mind." – Synca said continuing to read her book to Hermione who was listening very carefully while making some notes.

"Anyone has seen Cassie or Xsi?" – Alamar inquired.

"No." – Synca replied. "You, Hermione?"

"No." – Hermione answered quickly and coldly.

"Right." – Alamar sighed leaving the two. "Where could they be?"

Alamar paused then the revelation hit him. "Aha. They must be in the attic."

He quickly climbed the stairs and indeed found the two sisters near the roof window.

"Hi." – He greeted.

"Oh, hey Alamar." – Cassie said.

"How are you doing?"

"Great."

"Hmm." – Alamar grunted. It didn't seem that way to him. "Still unhappy with Athena?"

"Yeah." – Cassie answered instead of her sister.

"Well, no." – Xsi interjected.

"Yes, we're." – Cassie said.

"No, we aren't."

"Yes, you're..."

"Alright, I get it – time for the boy to leave." – Alamar said and turned around.

"No, no, we didn't mean it like this. Please stay." – Xsi said quickly.

"So?"

"So what Pluto?"

"So – yesterday, Hermione, so?"

"Well, it did get out of hand, didn't it?" – Xsi blushed.

"Yeah, it did – big time." – Alamar confirmed. "You should have seen yourselves – it was the perfect example of...I don't of what but it was...Hugh."

"We're sorry about this but you know sometimes it just happens." – Xsi said.

"Yeah, Hermione just exploded. She's just too straight – no deviations from the rules." – Cassie added.

"Well, she did deviate with us." – Alamar noted.

"Yeah, after the good persuasion of Cassie." - Xsi added.

"Well, I may have overreacted a bit but I was right." – Cassie admitted. "But she knows nothing about the twins."

"You have to make it up to her." – Alamar said.

"Why should we?" – Cassie raised an eyebrow.

"Well, for one it would be good to have peace and quiet, and two – she was probably right." – Alamar answered.

"Well, she isn't." – Cassie replied a bit sharply. "She doesn't know what happened."

"Really? What did happen?" – Alamar's interested was aroused.

"We'll tell you another time." – Cassie said.

"Oh come on!" – Alamar insisted looking at Cassie with sweet innocence. "Please!"

Cassie looked at him intently and sighed. "Well, alright." – She ceded. "A week before we met on the third floor in the night that Harry was supposed to get into trouble by Malfoy, we were on our way to Gryffindor Tower."

"Gryffindor Tower?" – Alamar exclaimed.

"Yeah we had a meeting with Hermione." – Xsi added.

"Yeah and on the way there, we heard silent steps like someone were slinking by so we stepped aside then we heard boys' voices but saw no one." – Cassie continued.

"You can imagine that this aroused our interest. I mean how often you hear voices floating into the air." – Xsi said.

"Voices and there was no one – how do you mean that?" – Alamar asked confused.

"Well, we heard boys' voices coming towards us but as we ducked we hoped to see who was talking but there was no one there – although we could clearly hear them so logically we had to assume they were invisible." – Cassie explained.

"You have to admit that this was highly interesting." – Xsi interjected.

"Well, yeah, it is." – Alamar admitted.

"But we couldn't see them so we had to wait for the voice to get further away from us before we could follow although to follow someone that is invisible is close to impossible." – Xsi said.

"Unless they are careless enough to speak aloud."- Cassie added then continued. "So we followed them. They went down almost to that ugly statue of the gray old lady."

"And then we saw a wand floating into the air tapping on the back of the statue, which opened instantly." – Xsi described the situation with gestures that it was turning it into something funny but exciting.

"Yeah," – Cassie chuckled. "And so we followed again. I mean it was mysterious and exciting – who can resist?"

"I gather anyone but you." – Alamar said ironically.

"Don't play the fool, Pluto." – Xsi teased. "Well, there were stairs and stairs, and then a tunnel – very long. The invisible were no longer invisible – guess who?"

"Fred and George?"

"Yeah," – Cassie confirmed. "They were talking so loudly."

"Maybe we wouldn't have followed them far if we didn't hear what they were talking about and that we did." – Xsi said.

"They were, believe it or not, discussing us – the new greenbacks." – Cassie made a grimace. "Greenbacks – us? This was insulting but it did not stop there."

"Yeah," – Xsi recalled mimicking Fred. "So ickles brother of mine, I think it would be fun."

"Yeah, I agree," – George joined in. "The little greenish sisters of Harry would be the perfect target."

"Well, yes, but the others as well..."

"But Ron's our brother..."

"Yeah, I know," – Fred smiled deviously. "Yeah so innocent so fragile – the already in place... should do it."

"True remember Alicia?"

"Well, that was an accident."

"Well, yeah, but they are the greenbacks so a little welcome to Hogwarts won't hurt although..."

"Yeah, you're right, absolutely right," – Fred exclaimed. "I was thinking of including our brother into the fun as well. What do you think?"

"Great idea."

"Imagine their faces." – Fred laughed.

"They could consider it – an offense." – George said.

"Oh, my," – Fred simulated fear. "And what would they do retaliate?"

"Yeah." – George laughed.

"As I was thinking we could do it regularly starting on the week before Halloween?"

"Why then – I say right now?"

"Right now would be difficult – oh brother of mine." – Fred said.

"Oh, yeah." – George laughed again realizing they were in the tunnel. "But when we're back..."



"So you see – they were planning to have fun with us – can you blame us?" – Cassie asked.

"Yes, I can." – Hermione answered. She was standing on the threshold of the attic door. "You started first."

"Oh, the bookworm," – Cassie remarked sarcastically. "No, we didn't – they did."

"Saying that you are going to do something and actually doing it are two very different things." – Hermione objected.

"True, Athena," – Cassie nodded, and continued. "But they did start first. Remember, the next morning, Xsi did not show up for Herbology, because she was in the infirmary having Madam Pomfrey taking care of the dust."

"No!" – Hermione exclaimed almost ironically.

"Well, yeah I was." – Xsi confirmed.

"Although you knew?"

"Well, we did but then I remembered a part of their conversation – "The already in place ... should do it." At the time, we didn't know what they were talking about so they've already done it."

"What dust?" – Alamar asked.

"Blister dust. Xsi was in...in...well...you can imagine." – Cassie mumbled.

"You're joking." – Hermione exclaimed, this time shocked.

"I wish we were but it did not stop there. Remember on flying lessons, I had a really nasty pimple?"

"Well, yeah, I do recall seeing it." – Hermione nodded.

"Well, it was after I drank my usual orange juice, and before you object, you well know that I sit on the edge of Slytherin table, and on the day of the prank, I do recall seeing those two near our table." – Cassie explained.

"Why didn't you report them?" – Hermione asked.

"I did not because I couldn't prove it – for you're right hearing about something and actually seeing it are two different things." – Cassie said bitterly.

"But Hannah Abbott said that she did see them." – Xsi added.

"So you had a witness!" – Alamar said.

"Well, yeah," – Cassie admitted. "But still..."

"It would have been fifty-fifty." – Hermione finished her sentence.

"You see." – Cassie smiled. "So we retaliated as you well know."

"Well, in this case they deserved it." – Hermione acknowledged making Cassie smile then added. "But it stops here."

"I wish it did." – Xsi sighed.

"Yeah, at the very end of the year, they did attack again. I don't think they figured out we were the Capers but obviously continuing their previous plan." – Cassie said.

Hermione was silent but she remembered. The sisters were not seen after the end of the year feast till the time they crossed the lake with the boats to reach the train station.

"You don't say after the feast?" – Hermione asked.

"Yeah. The method was inventive."

"But you said yesterday ungrateful?" – Alamar reminded. "What was that about?"

"Oh, well, they were planning on doing it on everyone. So Casper and Kaiser who were already at Hogwarts prevented it."

"Great." – Alamar exclaimed.

"Wait a minute!" – Hermione exclaimed raising eyebrows. "What do you mean they were already at Hogwarts? Did you call them?"

Cassie frowned. "Well, no."

"What?" – Alamar exclaimed.

"Yeah, Trivia saw them moving around the castle." – Cassie recalled. "As I come to think of it, it was almost after Harry started behaving oddly."

"You don't think Harry..." – Xsi said.

"It's possible," – Cassie shrugged. "Though I wonder why they would..."

"This is definitely strange." – Xsi admitted. "Harry did not mention anything about this."

"You're right," – Hermione agreed. "And as I come to think of it, he did not say what he had done into the forest before we found him in..."

"Well, he hasn't told us either." – Xsi said.

"He only told father." – Cassie added.

"Well, anyway," – Alamar interjected, diplomatically choosing his words. "Peace?"

The girls looked at each other then at Alamar and said together, "Peace." Then shook hands to seal the deal.

Alamar sighed. "Finally."

"What was that Pluto?" – Cassie inquired.

"Nothing." – Alamar replied innocently.

The girls laughed for it was obvious. Alamar joined them.

"Now, homework time." – Cassie announced to Hermione's surprise. "What?"

"Well, coming from you sounds..." – Hermione replied.

"Impossible, hard to believe..." – Cassie laughed.

"Yeah." – Hermione nodded.

"Well, do you think you can stick yourself into the back garden library without us seeing you?"

"I guess not." – Hermione shrugged a smile on her face.

"So let's go." – Cassie said.

Cassie led the way. Alamar still stood on the spot because of the sudden turn of things. "Girls," – he sighed, "Understanding them would take a life-time." He shrugged but followed them.

In anticipation of everyone, Lady Synca had already made the pre-noon tea with some crispy biscuits. The girls attacked the biscuits and the tea quite efficiently as though they had not seen food in a very long time.

"Which one of all is the most annoying?" – Synca asked.

"Potions." – Alamar answered. "It's Snape's subject."

"Well, then help yourselves," – Synca said and pointed at some books. "These should suffice."

"Oh, Potion Making and Advanced Elixirs, this is great." – Hermione exclaimed grabbing the first book and flipping through the pages looking for the properties of the moon stone.

"Anyway, Alamar, what do you care about homeworks?" – Xsi asked suddenly.

"Yeah, you've done yours." – Cassie agreed. "Care to share?"

"Dear, you've done yours?" – Synca looked up quickly.

"Well, yeah, I did, with Harry." – Alamar replied blushing slightly.

"Excellent!" – Synca exclaimed. "Then you can start by doing your choirs and I'll stay with the girls."

"Of course." – Alamar shrugged, and retorted silently. "Always me!"

"What's that dear?"

"Nothing, good day, ladies." – Alamar said bowing gently, and left the garden.

"Choirs – what choirs?" – Xsi asked intrigued.

"Yeah, I thought you have Elliot for that." – Cassie joined in.

"I do but Elliot is old and needs help besides it'll do him well." – Synca said casually.

"Sure will." – Cassie smiled.

"But we could have used his homework nonetheless." – Xsi added.

"Cheaters." – Hermione retorted.

"No harm in trying, Athena." – Cassie said.

Hermione said nothing but there was a tiny smile on her face. They spent the next few hours to lunch writing the Potions' homework, which Hermione managed to finish though she did write about four pages of parchment more than it was required. Cassie and Xsi were almost done.

Synca left them to see if lunch was ready. She returned shortly after.

"Lunch is ready, girls!"

The girls left their quills down and followed Synca. This time, Alamar has outdone himself – the dishes looked remarkably like the ones at Hogwarts on special occasions. Everyone enjoyed lunch though they ate in silence.

The afternoon they continued with the sad duty of writing the homeworks. Alamar was popping in from time to time to say hi while

continuing his sad duty of cleaning the house. Near dinner time, they were almost done.

"What's left?" – Cassie asked while putting her quill down as she just finished Herbology.

"History of Magic!" – Xsi replied. "This is the most boring subject we have."

"Ah, yeah, professor Binns." – Synca exclaimed while entering. "He taught your cousin Feela before he decided to teach without his body."

"I can't imagine what the difference would be with or without his body." – Xsi imitated the professor with the same voice making the others laugh.

"Why don't you, girls, take a brake and finish this one tomorrow?" – Synca proposed.

"Ah, not tomorrow, mom." – Alamar shook his head.

"Why not?" – Synca looked at her son questioningly.

"You have not forgotten, have you?" – Alamar asked making strange faces. Synca shook her head thus Alamar added. "Tomorrow, we are going to Gemini Bay."

"Oh, yeah." – Synca remembered. "I almost forgot. Thank you, dear!"

"Gemini Bay?" – The others looked up perplexed.

"Yeah, you'll see – tomorrow." – Alamar replied mysteriously.

The next morning Alamar was first to wake up. He got dressed up, prepped up his bag and went to wake the others. Hermione was already up when he arrived. The other two were a bit difficult to wake up.

"Why so early?" – The sleepy Xsi asked.

"You'll see." – Alamar replied. "Come on, be ready in the next ten minutes."

"Ten minutes? Is he out of his rockers?" – Xsi moaned.

"Come on, sis." – Cassie popped her head in the room almost dressed. "Or I'll help you."

"So not fair." – Xsi groaned with frustration but got up.

Twenty minutes later, they were all ready at the front gate. Lady Synca started looking around through the garbage confusing the girls.

"What's she looking for?" – Hermione asked Alamar.

"For the portkey." – Alamar replied.

"Portkey – what's that?"

"It is usually a piece of junk, made to look innocent enough so the muggles won't pick it up. The Portkey can transport you to a predetermined location at a prearranged time. There are few that are strictly private." – Alamar explained patiently.

"I read about Portkeys." – Hermione said. "They are placed strategically at two hundred points around the country. Which is the closest, Pluto?"

"The one, mom, is looking for right now. It's our private one, if of course she can find it."

"Synca, should we land a hand?" – Cassie proposed.

"No, dears, no need, I found it." – Synca puffed from the other side of the gate. She was carrying a car tire, heavily soaked with water. "Come on, we have about a minute. Gather round, and touch it with hand or a finger."

They gathered around the tire, put a finger on it and waited. HHermione tried not imagining what a muggle would say if he was to see four children and an adult holding a car tire.

"It's time. Hold on." – Synca muttered.

It happened immediately. They all felt as though a hook just behind the navel had been suddenly jerked irresistibly forward. Their feet left the ground; their shoulders banging in each other; they were all speeding forward in a howl of wind and swirling colors – their hands and fingers stuck to the tire as though pulling them magnetically forward and then...Their feet slammed into the ground. The tire jumped over before hitting the ground with a loud thud. Cassie lost her balance and fell over Alamar while the others remained on their feet.

"Sorry, Pluto." – Cassie said while getting up and helping Alamar.

"Don't worry! The first time is always the most difficult." – Alamar puffed.

"Where are we?" – Xsi asked looking around.

They were standing on the edge of a cliff facing the sea. Just beneath them was a lovely beach of golden sand surrounded at north by densely growing palm trees.

"We've arrived at Gemini Bay." – Synca announced.

"Why is it called Gemini?" – Hermione inquired.

"You'll see." – Alamar answered instead of his mother.

"You keep repeating this." – Cassie remarked.

"Yeah, I do and I have a good reason." – Alamar said with a mysterious smile on his face.

"Let's go." – Synca prodded.

"Well, there is no bay here." – Xsi noticed looking at the sea. "Are you sure we're where we are supposed to be."

"Yes, we are." – Synca confirmed. "You'll see."

They kept walking alongside the rocky cliff until they reached a small path leading down the cliff. The path was narrow and almost



invisible unless exactly you knew where to look for it. The descent took about half an hour though it didn't look so from above. The path was zigzagging a lot. Finally they reached the beach. But still it did not look they were in the right place. There was simply a beach and the sea. The sand however was stone cold despite the warm weather.

"Hmm, this is interesting." – Cassie mumbled curiously.

"Yes, it is." – Alamar whispered.

The day they spent was in the shades of the palm trees. Synca and Alamar built the camp while Hermione set the fire. Cassie and Xsi did what they do best – exploring the area. Actually, they wanted to find the reason for the sand being stone cold while outside usually water would boil but had little success.

The night came quickly but they stayed in the shades until the moon came up. Then they observed something not only unusual for muggles but for wizards too. The sand turned from golden to silver. The reflection of the sand at first illuminated the beach like a torch then they could clearly see the bay forming. It was all oval with two rocks at the edge of the bay that resembled the figures of two young maidens. The figures were of exact shape and size though one's eyes were gold and the other's silver.

Alamar spoke of an old legend. A long time ago, a powerful sorcerer enchanted the bay to be visible only at moon rise. In the past, the first maiden was supposed to guard the bay during the sunlight and the other during starlight but they chose otherwise so they could be with their lovers during the day. But the sorcerer learnt of this disobedience so he performed a complex enchantment reversing the natural order. The heat of the sand would come only on moon rise while during the day it would be stone cold as though it was night. The maidens never learnt what their disobedience had caused. They have broken a promise and from this day forward the wizards came up with the Unbreakable Vow so now no one could break a promise of importance or he would forfeit his life like the maidens did – now eternal guardians – called now Gemini Bay.

"Wow – that's profound." – Cassie remarked after Alamar finished.

"Yeah, it is harsh." – Xsi agreed.

"The Unbreakable Vow?" – Hermione looked up.

"Yes, the Unbreakable Vow is made only when you make promise that you have to keep with your life – it is a magic contract." – Alamar explained.

"Wow!" – Hermione exclaimed.

"Pluto, thank you!" – Cassie said.

"What for?" – Alamar asked.

"It is so beautiful here and yet so..." – Cassie replied but Hermione finished her sentence.

"...so educational."

"Well, I guess the beautiful part comes from me," – Alamar said.  
"And the educational one comes from Mom."

"Thank you!"

Then no one spoke until the first day light for the night was beautiful and yet somehow sad. Cassie and Xsi seemed a bit off during the next day. They were no longer themselves as they've spent the night at Gemini Bay sitting closely to Hermione. During the night's last hour, the three of them were silently whispering.

Alamar definitely noticed the change in the behavior of the Solmyr's sisters and wondered what they could have possibly talked about. But the change was visible also in Hermione. The three seemed now to be the best of friends as though the night spent at Gemini Bay managed to forge their bond stronger than any other experience could ever accomplish that. But he was happy for them – at least they weren't trying to kill each other and his quiet.

The night they spent on the roof of the citadel. Just ten hours before that, Errol, Ron's owl had arrived so Hermione sat down writing a letter to Harry and Ron, and the troublemakers joined her.

"Athena, are you writing a letter to the boys?" – Cassie asked.

"Yeah, I am." – Hermione replied the quill in hand.

"Ah, girls, we still have the last homework to complete." – Xsi reminded.

"I'll help you with it." – Synca popped her head from the living room.  
"Oh, and by the way your school letters have arrived."

The girls left the writing of the letter and hurried to the living room.  
They read their letters.

"Hmm, the new teacher against the Dark Arts must a fan of Lockhart." – Xsi noticed.

"Yeah, he must be." – Alamar agreed.

"Everybody's talking about him these days." – Synca remarked with an annoyed tone. "And I think he's such a j..."

"Mom!" – Alamar exclaimed seemingly shocked. "Language!"

The girls giggled at this remark so did Synca.

"Well, we'll see." – Synca said.

"How about tomorrow?" – Alamar proposed. The others looked at him questioningly.

"Any particular reason why?" – Cassie looked intently at him.

"No." – Alamar said firmly then added. "Well, ok, I just want to be done with it."

"Alright then – it is decided we go tomorrow." – Synca concluded.

"Athena, warn the rest of the gang." – Xsi interjected.

"Oh, the letter, yes." – Hermione exclaimed.

"No," – Cassie cut her off. "First the wretched homework then the letter, there is still plenty of time."

"Sure!"

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 18

### Flourish and Blotts

The moonlight crept down a narrow lane bordered on the left by wild, low-growing raspberry-canes and brambles and on the right by a high, almost perfectly manicured hedge. Just right leading off the lane was a wide driveway. Peacocks strutted along the top of the high yew hedges that curved all the way to the distant pair of impressively designed wrought iron gates.

A handsome manor grew out of the darkness at the end of the straight drive, lights glinting in the diamond downstairs windows. A fountain somewhere in the dark garden beyond the hedge was playing. The front door made of magnificent mahogany wood stood as impressive impenetrable guard of the manor. And it swung inwards though it was not visible who had opened it and a shadow that was not there a second ago stepped in.

The hallway was large, dimly lit and sumptuously decorated, with a magnificent carpet covering most of the polished like glass marble floor. The eyes of the pale faced portraits tried to identify the source of this shadow but failed. They were about to alert its residents to its presence but another shadow as a tiny branch appeared. It flicked and the portraits lost all vocals. The shadow strode past them and halted before a heavy wooden door leading no doubt to the next room. The bronze handle turned and then the shadow ventured through.

In the middle of the room there was a nice, ornate table surrounded by twelve luxury upholstered stools with clawed legs. Illumination came from the roaring fire beneath the marble mantelpiece surrounded by gilded mirrors. The shadow lingered for a moment as it grew accustomed to the lack of light.

On an armchair near the mantelpiece the shadow spotted the figure of a man asleep. The man's hair silver blond glinted in the darkness. The shadow approached slowly. The man did not hear it coming nonetheless the shadow halted, took a chair and sat down. Then the tiny branch like shadow appeared again but on the light of the fire it was became clear it is a wand. The shadow raised the wand whispering several words and the disillusionment charm dissipated.

The shadow was no more instead stood a six feet two stalwart figure of a handsome man mid forties. His eyes a light shade of yellow scanned the sleeping man with an inhuman leer. His dark smile revealed milk white teeth with protruding fangs. His long, blood red mantle flapped around his ankles as he examined the room more thoroughly.

Satisfied he turned his attention back to the sleeping man. He pointed his wand to the armchair and whispered: "Cinxi ferra corpus." Ropes of liquid iron tightened around the body of the sleeping man brutally waking him up.

"Silentia," – And the brutally awoken man lost his voice that was about to create unnecessary noise.

"Good evening, Mr. Malfoy." – The voice came as though from a great distance and yet it seemed omnipresent bouncing off the walls inside the awoken man's head. "I am Lord Albert Cornelius of the Dakula Clan."

Cornelius crouched and stared at Malfoy's terrified grey eyes.

"You have a beautiful home, Mr. Malfoy." – Cornelius continued. "And it would be a shame to lose it to the clan unless..."

Malfoy's terror subdued and he looked expectantly at his uninvited guest. But this change of behavior turned out to be a mistake. Apparently Cornelius expected his victim to maintain its terror.

"Menta minoris." – Cornelius whispered.

If Malfoy could scream he would have screeched for hours as the pain that hit him was beyond description. It was perhaps the first time he experienced that tormenting spell used only in the past. Fire needles pierced every fiber of his brain. The effect of the spell continued for two agonizing minutes.

And when Cornelius finally broke it Malfoy felt sick as he puked all over his handsome night robe. His head pounded of the agonizing aftereffects of the spell and the headache did not leave him for the next two days.

"Unless," – Cornelius continued relentlessly as though nothing had happened. "You assist us. I realize you will not be volunteering but your help is required nonetheless."

Cornelius stood up and walked around.

"You have significant influence at the Ministry for Magic and at the board of trustees of Hogwarts." – Cornelius halted, turning around he glared again then lifted his gaze of Malfoy satisfied and continued. "It has been two or maybe three centuries we had any interest in the inner workings of the wizards. For someone like you it would seem crazy we know nothing about a simple thing like the departure place for the students leaving for school or the access point for that shopping alley – Dia something. And this is why we need you with this insignificant information in all its details. Of course, you will have to provide us with all you know about the ministry and the school for magic. And then you will be free for a while. Stand I clear on that one?"

Malfoy nodded as much he could. Cornelius smiled. "Excellent."

He moved towards Malfoy and stopped before him. "Medeo!" A heat sensation crossed through Malfoy's body though it did not relieve him of the headache. The iron ropes loosened. Malfoy stood up but had little time to prepare.

"Mens impertio."

The effect of the spell was something Malfoy had never experienced. He felt his thoughts merge and regretted it almost immediately. Cornelius's mind was no place for a wizard light, dark or otherwise, and even human. It was so dark and evil even the Dark Lord himself seemed like the good shepherd.

"Hmm, it seems nothing has changed much at least for the departure point for Hogwarts." – Cornelius said after a while. "Hogwarts, only wizards could use such a ridiculous name for a school. The mortals have increased their numbers – yet again. Well, this will change soon enough." Cornelius continued mumbling while continuously exploring every facet of Malfoy's memory regarding the subjects which were of interest to him. Poor Malfoy was completely helpless against this mind intrusion. Sure, he was trained to resist the mind probes but this was a very different experience.

This unpleasant experience continued almost all night. Cornelius learned enough. He now knew where the children had to board the train express and the places this train was passing by should the first encounter go ill. The only problem has always been the defenses of Hogwarts but Malfoy solved that problem. Of course, Cornelius foresaw another set of problems once one gets inside. This was not going to be easy but it was not impossible. It was time for the Necromancers to pay for their insolence for all these years and with this wizard's help the Dakula Clan was to about to strike back.

Cornelius however spotted something rather interesting in Malfoy's mind. A small book left to him by the Dark Lord. The wretched wizard believed it could unleash Slytherin's monster. This could create enough havoc for his hunters to move undisturbed provided they behave. So before leaving Malfoy, Cornelius intensified this idea in Malfoy and then rearranged his memory.

"We'll meet again, Mr. Malfoy." – Cornelius said before leaving.

The next morning, Lucius Malfoy woke up abruptly sweating hard. But he had no recollection of Cornelius's visit however the intensified idea to use the diary was present. Lucius sought the diary, which on first sight did not seem very impressive or of great value. It had a shabby black cover and the faded year on the corner suggested it was about fifty years old. Lucius opened it just to check but the pages were blank. He left the diary on the mantelpiece before going to change into more appropriate clothes.

"Good morning, dear." – Narcissa Malfoy greeted as she was descending down the marble staircase heading for the kitchen. She was a pale woman with long, blonde hair and cold blue eyes.

Lucius did not bother answer. He hurried up the stairs. Reaching the master bedroom, he found his clean clothes folded on the bed. He dressed quickly but before he could venture out of the room he felt dizzy and fell on the floor. It was the after effect of Cornelius's spell though Lucius did not remember that part but still his head pounded with pain. Lucius managed to get back to his feet. He reached for a small vial on the night table and drank it all in one gulp. He felt better almost immediately or at least that was what the momentarily feeling was. Anyway it felt good.



Downstairs, Narcissa was slanging. The breakfast was again not done properly at least according to her.

"How stupid are you?" – She was screeching at a little creature with large, bat like ears and bulging green eyes the size of tennis balls.

"What's going on in here?" – Lucius rushed in.

"That pesky creature burned the toast again." – Narcissa screeched.

"Dobby," – Lucius said with a greasy voice.

"Master," – The little creature squeaked looking terrified at his master.

Lucius took his cane and started drubbing him on the head, shoulders, everywhere he could reach him. Dobby managed to dodge the last few as he escaped the kitchen.

"Damn house elf, can't do anything right." – Lucius said catching his breath as though he was the one dodging the hits.

"Dad,"

"Yes, Draco."

"You promised. You haven't forgotten, have you?"

"Yes, I have." – Lucius retorted. "Stop bugging me!"

Draco Malfoy exited with a victorious smirk on his pale face. He passed by the sobbing Dobby and headed for his room. Dobby on the other hand was already making his plans to warn Harry Potter. He had to warn him before it was too late. He would have to punish himself later but he had little choice. Harry was the best hope for everyone. Dobby knew that the best time to leave Wiltshire would be at night.

Somewhere near Ottery St Catchpole

The morning was bright and shinny. Molly was in the kitchen where the aroma of fresh beagles filled the air while Arthur was in the

garage probably fixing some of his muggle machinery. Molly often wondered what her husband could possibly find so interesting about the muggle's technology but there it was. She of course feared that for if Arthur was to make a search he would have most probably to arrest himself. Arthur did defend himself saying that there is part in the law which states that it is ok to have such provided that the object or objects are not used even if enchanted.

Oddly enough the first to venture into the kitchen were the twins. They had put their pure innocence face so it was difficult to tell what they were up to this morning. Percy came right after them which were also slightly unusual.

"Good morning." – Molly greeted her sons then turned to Fred. "Where are Ron and Harry?"

"Good morning, dear mother," – George cut in melodically imitating his brother. "We have no bearing on the whereabouts of the mischievers."

"In that case you need a compass, oh brother of mine." – Fred said.

"I'll be sure to buy one at the first opportune moment."

"Fred, go and get them." – Molly interrupted the exchange.

Meanwhile, Harry was already dressed and was descending down to the kitchen when he bumped into Ginny.

"Sorry," – Harry said and added. "And good morning."

Ginny blushed immensely but squeezed the answer. "Good morning!"

Harry was about to continue on his way but stopped surprised. He did not expect an answer. He kind of became used to it.

"I like you!"

Harry looked at her. She was about to combust out of uneasiness but withstood his gaze. Harry was unsure what to reply.

"Really?"

"Yeah." – She replied still not averting eyes.

"Well...that's nice." – Harry said then added quickly. "Me too."

"Really?" – She asked eagerly.

"Yeah." – Harry swallowed. "Friends?"

Ginny shook his hand adding happily "Sure!"

"Breakfast." – Fred's voice echoed. "Harry, Ron, breakfast."

Ginny and Harry descended together. Fred looked at them strangely. He was so surprised to see them together that he forgot to speak for a moment. Ginny just smiled and entered into the kitchen.

"Well mate, I don't know what you did." – Fred said finally smiling.

"Nothing." – Harry mumbled passing quickly by him. Ron came shortly after.

Breakfast was quiet, only Fred was observing closely Ginny and Harry. George, his brother, noticed the increased attention.

"What's up oh brother of mine?" – He asked him quietly.

"Tell you later." – Fred whispered back.

Breakfast finished Molly instructed all to wait in the living room. Arthur soon came with a pot of dust – Floo Powder.

"Right now, Fred, George, you go first." – Arthur said handing the pot before the twins.

Fred took a pinch, stepped into the fire that roared with emerald flames and vanished. George followed him.

"I go next." – Percy said taking another pinch.

"Meet you before Gringotts." – Arthur instructed.

"Sure!" – Percy vanished.

"Ginny, you're next! Just wait for your mother." – Arthur turned to Ginny.

"I can do this on my own." – Ginny protested.

"Well, alright – Ron and Harry – go!"

"See you on the other side mate." – Ron winked at Harry before vanishing with the Floo Powder.

Harry was in line next. The emerald fires roared. He stepped in but in the next moment he sensed that someone bumped into behind making him to cough – "Dia-gon A..Alley!" The feeling now was not comfortable at all. Fireplaces were spinning in a swirl of colors before his eyes. He felt much heavier than normal and soon understood why. He fell face forward onto cold stone and felt his glasses falling off but it was not the only thing he felt. Someone fell over him.

He opened his eyes only to notice red hair across his face. He knew instantly what had happened. Ginny was the one that bumped into him. It was not that he minded but a quick look around told him that they were not where they were supposed to be for the stone cold floor did not belong to the Leaky Cauldron.

"Ginny!" – He called.

Ginny stirred looking apprehensively around. "Where are we?"

"I haven't got the foggiest." – Harry replied honestly. "But did you have to jump me?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Dad wanted for you to wait so I tried to grab you and...well." – Ginny explained, shrugging then added. "And I didn't jump you."

Harry averted his eyes embarrassed for a moment realizing what he had accused her of but then chuckled. Clearing his throat he said, "Well, anyway, let's see where we are."

Harry stood then helped Ginny up too. One thing became sure they were not in any wizard shop that would sell anything needed for Hogwarts.

A glass case nearby held a withered hand on a cushion, a bloodstained card deck, and a starring glass eye. Evil looking masks stared down from the walls, rusty spiked instruments hung from the ceiling, and an assortment of human bones lay upon the counter. Even worse, the street – dark and narrow was definitely not Diagon Alley.

They had to get out and quickly so without making noise they made their way towards the door, but before they got halfway through, two people appeared on the other side of the glass – and of them was someone Harry did not want to see when he was lost and covered in soot: Draco Malfoy.

"Quickly back!" – He commanded Ginny whispering.

"Harry, in here." – Ginny pointed at a large black cabinet; they crammed inside it and pulled the doors closed, leaving only a small crack to peek through. Few seconds later, the shop's bell clanged, and Malfoy stepped into the shop.

The man who followed Draco was Malfoy Senior. He still hadn't completely recovered from the mind spell though he remembered nothing of it anyway. He had gone to see a medic but the remedy he got wasn't helping much. The medic associated the pain with emotional trauma rather than any physical problem which helped only to further frustrate Malfoy Senior. So right now, he was quite irritable.

Harry noticed the striking resemblance and reached the logical conclusion but had no time to ponder further. Malfoy Senior crossed quickly the shop looking at some of the items on display passing awfully close to the cabinet but hopefully did not see anything worth seeing.

Malfoy Senior reached the counter where he rang the bell on it then turned around and said to Draco, "Touch nothing."

Draco who had already reached for the glass eye pulled back. "I though you said you're going to buy me a present."

"I said I will be buying you a racing broom." – Mr. Malfoy retorted while drumming his fingers on the counter.

"What point is there if I'm not on the House team?" – Malfoy snapped, obviously in a bad temper. "Potter got a Nimbus 2000 last year, obviously with Dumbledore's special permission so he could play for Gryffindor. He's not even that good..."

Draco was now examining a shelf of skulls.

"...everyone think he's so smart, wonderful Potter with his famous scar, even the Solmyr one."

"Enough!" – Malfoy Senior snapped back. "You've told me that a dozen times already. And I would remind that is not very prudent to look at Potter otherwise. After all our kind regards him as the one that brought down the Dark Lord so you'd do better and be nice with him too, ah Mr. Borgin finally. I can certainly grow roots while waiting for you to grace us with your presence."

Borgin ignored the last remark smoothing his greasy hair away from his face.

"Mr. Malfoy, what a pleasure to see you." – He greeted in a voice as oily as his hair. "Delighted – and young Mr. Malfoy. How may I be of assistance? Just in today, on reasonable price..."

"I have not come to buy but to sell." – Malfoy cut him off.

Borgin's smile faded. "To sell?"

"Yes, the Ministry for Magic has instituted a new policy regarding poisons and thus is conducting more raids than usual." – Malfoy took out a parchment from his pocket, and unraveled it for Borgin to read, "I have a few...items that would embarrass me if they were to be found by the Ministry."

Mr. Borgin fixed his eyes on the list then mumbled. "The ministry wouldn't presume to trouble you, sir, surely?"

Mr. Malfoy's lips curled. "No, of course, not, the name Malfoy still commands some respect but the Ministry's boldness is growing.

There are certain rumors about a new Muggles Protection Act – no doubt that flea-bitten, Muggle-loving Arthur Weasley is behind it."

Ginny felt a hot surge of anger, and wanted to reach for Harry's wand. Harry also did not like the tone of Mr. Malfoy. "Shush," – he whispered barely audible.

"And as you see some of these poisons might..."

"I see, of course and let me see..." – Borgin said.

"Can I have that?" – Draco interrupted pointing at a withered hand.

"Ah, the hand of Glory," – Borgin said abandoning Malfoy's list and scurrying over to Draco. "Excellent choice! Insert a candle and the hand will give light only to the holder! Best friend of thieves and plunderers."

"I'd hope my son to become something better than that." – Malfoy said icily.

"I did not mean to offend..." – Borgin swallowed.

"Of course, if his grades do not improve he might be just suited for this anyway." – Malfoy added even more icily.

"It's not my fault." – Draco stated visibly offended. "The teachers all have favorites, that Granger..."

"I should think you'd be ashamed by now being beaten by a girl of no wizard family at every exam." – Malfoy shot.

"It's the same everywhere." – Borgin said in his oily voice. "Wizard blood counts for less and less..."

"Not with me." – Malfoy stated, his nostrils flaring.

"No sir, nor with me, sir." – Borgin said making a low bow.

"Good, then shall we get back to our list." – Malfoy smirked. "I'm somewhat in hurry, Borgin."

They started to haggle while Harry and Ginny watched nervously as Draco was getting nearer them. He had stopped watching over a magnificent necklace of opals over which was written – Caution: Do not touch! Cursed – Has claimed the Lives of twenty four Muggle owners to date.

Draco turned away from the necklace and spotted the cabinet. He walked to it, stretched his hand to open...

"Done!" – Mr. Malfoy said at the counter. "Come, Draco – "

Harry whipped his forehead with his sleeve as Draco turned away.

"Good day to you, Mr. Borgin. I'll be expecting you at the manor tomorrow to pick up the goods."

The doors closed. Borgin was still standing but had dropped his oily manner.

"Good day to you, Malfoy! If the rumors are true then you haven't sold me even half of what's hidden in your manor."

Muttering Borgin disappeared into the back room. Harry and Ginny waited for another two minutes in case Borgin returned then slipped out of the cabinet, as quietly as possible, pass the glass cases, and out of the shop door.

They emerged into a dingy alley that seemed to be made of shops dedicated to the Dark Arts. Borgin seemed to be the largest nonetheless facing his shop there was a nasty display of shrunken heads.

Harry caught Ginny by the hand and feeling a bit jumpy set off onwards. An old wooden street sign hanging from a shop selling poisonous candles told them they were at Knocturne Alley.

"Are you lost, dears?" – An aged witch in front of them asked, holding a tray of what horribly looked like fingernails.

"Not at all." – Ginny replied with the same supremacy in the voice as Harry was used to with Hermione. Harry looked at her but Ginny only smiled. She led the way down the street though Harry was pretty sure she had no idea where she was going.



Soon they saw the outlines of the white wizard bank – Gringotts.

"Lucky shot." – Harry said, relieved they were out of this street.

"Yeah." – Ginny admitted but added with a broadening smile. "But it was fun."

"Sure!" – Harry let a tiny laugh.

"Harry! Ginny! Over here!"

They looked up and saw Hermione, Cassie and Xsi on the steps of Gringotts. They run down to greet them.

"What are you two doing coming of there?" – Cassie asked looking suspicious.

"Nothing, we got a bit lost." – Harry replied quickly.

"Really?" – Xsi asked with interest. "Where did you end up?"

"Knocturne Alley." – Ginny exclaimed before Harry could reply.

"Where is the rest?" – Hermione asked.

"I don't know. We got separated." – Harry answered.

"Not for long." – Cassie said pointing up the street where Ron, Fred, George, Percy, Mr. Weasley were sprinting.

"Ginny, Harry," – Mr. Weasley panted. "We hoped you were gone only one grate too far." He mopped his glistening bald patch, "Molly's frantic – she's coming... Ginny don't scare us like that again."

"Sorry, dad." – Ginny looked down.

"Where did you end up?" – Ron asked.

"Knocturne Alley." – Xsi replied.

"No way – we've never been allowed in." – Ron exclaimed enviously.

"Cool!" – The twins exclaimed.

"You should ruddy think not." – Mr. Weasley growled. "Knocturne Alley is not a place for decent people."

Gasping for breath, Molly arrived, a large a handbag clinging onto her hand. She pulled a clothes' brush and started sweeping off the soot. Soon, Harry and Ginny were all cleaned up.

"Guess who will saw at Borgin and Burkes?" – Harry asked Ron while climbing the steps to Gringotts.

"Who?"

"Malfoy Senior and Draco."

"No way!"

"Was Lucius buying something?" – Arthur asked interested.

"No, he was selling, poisons." – Ginny replied instead of Harry.

"Ah, so, he's worried." – Arthur said pleased. "I'd love to catch him off guard."

"You will be careful, Arthur," – Molly said sharply. "That family is nothing but trouble. Don't go biting off more than you can chew..."

"What you're saying that I'm no match for Lucius Malfoy?" – Arthur snapped but was distracted almost at once as he spotted Hermione's parents standing near by the counter waiting for Hermione.

"Mom, Dad, what are you doing here?" – Hermione asked as she got to them. "I thought..."

"You forgot to take your mantle." – Mrs. Granger replied smiling as she hugged her daughter. "And your father has some business here."

"What?" – Hermione looked at her mother stunned. "What business?"

"I'm opening an account at the bank." – Mr. Granger said.

Hermione blinked, staring surprised at her father then regaining her composure. "You mean a vault."

"Yeah, a vault, an account, whatever." – Mr. Granger nodded distractedly. "Ah, Mr. Bogrod."

Hermione turned and saw a goblin in what appeared to be a red gown moving slowly towards them. "Mr. Granger, if you would follow me."

"I won't be long." – Mr. Granger strode off behind Bogrod.

"When did he come up with this idea?" – Hermione turned to her mother.

"Last year, dear." – The answer was. "He wanted you to have your own vault so to avoid exchanging money, every year."

"Oh, so you're..." – Arthur had approached.

"Muggles, yes, we are." – Mrs. Granger politely cut him off.

"I'm happy to make your acquaintance." – Arthur said smiling broadly as though it was his birthday.

Molly joined Arthur while Harry went with his sisters to speak with a goblin regarding their vault. Ron stayed with his brothers and sister.

"Hi." – Cassie smiled at the goblin on the counter. "My father, Lord Solmyr, must have sent you a letter regarding the withdrawal of..."

"Yes, Miss Solmyr, Lord Solmyr, sent me special instructions. I have your keys." – The goblin interrupted. "I'll send for Griphook to lead you there."

"Thank you!" – Cassie bowed gently.

"By the way, where is Alamar?" – Harry asked looking around.

"He's gone already down." – Xsi replied.

"Ah, as well, we're ready," – Cassie said. "We'll go with the Grangers, and you'll go with the Weasleys."

"Alright." – Harry agreed taking his key from Griphook that had just arrived before them. "Meet you back here!"

Another goblin has arrived to take the Weasleys down to their vault. The way to the vaults could be reached by goblin-driven carts that sped along miniature train tracks throughout the underground tunnels of the bank. Harry enjoyed the breakneck journey down to the Weasley's vault. When it opened he noticed the sheer surprise on everyone's faces. There was a small pile of bronze Knuts, a somewhat bigger pile of silver Sickles, and ten columns of gold Galleons.

"Arthur, how's this possible?" – Molly looked at her husband.

"Ah, well," – Arthur seemed even more confused than his wife but then found something in the nearby corner. "Ah, this explains it all. Molly, look, "– He showed her a piece of parchment, "It is the pay for Bill's services as a curse breaker, from Lord Solmyr."

"Ah, yes, he did mention it but I did not expect..." – Molly recalled Lord Solmyr's letter but was still surprised.

"Oh well, now we can buy everyone what they deserve." – Arthur exclaimed happily but then turned to the rest of the family and added. "Within reason, of course."

Then they reached Harry's vault. Harry did try to hide a bit its contents as it was upside down full of Galleons, Sickles and Knuts. He grabbed a bag and filled it in with what he thought would be sufficient for this year.

Back outside the steps of Gringotts, they all separated. The twins joined their friend from Hogwarts, Lee Jordan. Percy muttered something about a new quill. Molly took Ginny to the robe shop. Arthur took the Grangers for a drink to the Leaky Cauldron. Cassie, Xsi and Hermione took off together to the Perfumes store.

"We'll all meet at Flourish and Blotts in an hour to buy your schoolbooks." – Molly said. "And not one step on Knocturne Alley," – she shouted at the retreating backs of the twins.

Harry, Ron and Alamar strolled off along the winding, cobbled street. The bag of gold, silver and bronze coins jangling cheerfully in Harry's pocket was clamoring to be spent, so he bought everyone a large strawberry and peanut butter ice-cream, while they examined the fascinating shop windows.

They passed by the Quidditch Quality Supplies where Ron stood a bit longer longing at a full set of robes for the Chudley Cannons, then they went to the Gambol and Japes Wizarding Jokes Store. There they met Fred, George and Lee Jordan, who were stoking up on Dr. Filibuster's Fabulous Wet-Start and No-Heat Fireworks. They moved on to a tiny junk shop full of broken wands, lopsided brass scales, old cloaks covered in potion stains. There they found Percy deeply immersed into a small book "Prefects who gained power."

"A study of Hogwarts prefects and their later career," – Ron read off the back of the book, "This sounds interesting..."

"Go away," – Percy snapped.

"Course," – Ron said then turning to Alamar and Harry added, "He's very ambitious, Percy, he's got plans for after Hogwarts...he wants to be Minister for Magic."

"That certainly would be fun." – Alamar said. "Percy, advancing your career?"

"Oh, don't get him started already, or we'll never know the end of it." – Ron said quickly leaving the shop.

"I wonder where the girls are." – Harry pondered.

"Well, let's find them." – Alamar suggested cheerfully.

They found Cassie, Xsi and Hermione before the ice-cream shop, enjoying large chocolate tarts.

"Hey boys," – Cassie called seeing them come.

"Seen all, done all?" – Alamar asked.

"Mostly." – Xsi replied. "You?"

"Yeah, mostly," – Alamar nodded. "Just have to get some ink and parchment."

"See you at Flourish and Blotts; seems to be a large crowd there." – Cassie said.

"Wondering why?" – Ron pondered.

"We'll see." – Harry said. "Let's go."

Half an hour later, they went straight to the bookshop where they saw a large banner saying:

GILDEROY LOCKHART

will be signing copies of his autobiography

MAGICAL ME!

today from 12:30 P.m. to 4:30 P.m.

"You know it looks like he adores more himself than the books he's selling." – Alamar remarked seeing the big smiling picture of Lockhart.

"I have to agree, mate." – Ron nodded.

"Famous till proven otherwise, Ron." – Harry smiled.

"Yeah, Nimbus, and only from selling books." – Cassie added, patting him on the back.

"You are not going to say you actually like him now, are you?" – Alamar asked with clear disgust in his voice.

"No, but he's written all of our books..." – Cassie was saying.

"Actually, sis, most of our books." – Xsi corrected her.

"We are actually going to meet him!" – Hermione squealed.

"Hermione, give it a rest." – Alamar scowled. "The guy is phony. I mean, come on, look at all those pictures – the guy is a bloody narcissus, a model."

"Pluto, you're not jealous, now are you?" – Cassie teased but Alamar did not bother to reply.

The crowd in front of the bookshop seemed to be made up mostly of witches around Molly's age. The girls and the boys managed to squeeze inside. A long line wound right to the back of the shop where Lockhart was signing his books. Each grabbed a copy of The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 2 and sneaked up the line to where the rest of the Weasleys were standing with Mr. and Mrs. Granger.

"Oh, there you are dears." – Molly said, panting for air, but keeping patting her hair. "We'll be able to see him in a minute."

Finally, Gilderoy Lockhart came into view seated at a table surrounded by large pictures of his face, all winking and flashing dazzlingly white teeth at the crowd. The real Lockhart was wearing sky-blue robes that exactly matched the color of his eyes and sun-yellow sleeves matching his golden, wavy hair.

A short but irritating man was dancing around the crowd taking photographs with a large camera that emitted puffs of purple smoke with every blinding flash.

"Out of the way, here," – He snarled at Ron while moving back to get a better shot. "It's for the Daily Prophet..."

"Big deal!" – Ron shot, rubbing his foot where the photographer had just stepped on.

Gilderoy Lockhart heard him. He saw Ron and then noticed Harry next to him. He stared but then jumped to his feet mumbling, "It can't be? Harry Potter!"

Lockhart dived and the crowd parted. He grabbed Harry by the elbow, and pulled him to the front. The crowd burst into applause. Harry found this not only a bit embarrassing but also very irritating

as Lockhart shook his hand while the photographer was taking shots like crazy.

"Give a smile, Harry!" – Lockhart said through his gleaming teeth. "Together, you and I are worth the front page."

"Sure," – Harry mumbled back, "For your or my benefit?"

"Both, Harry, both!" – Lockhart replied while putting on another of his dazzling smiles for the photographer.

When it was finally over, Harry could barely feel his fingers. He did not return to the Weasleys for he had a feeling Lockhart was not quite finished besides he had just caught a glimpse of a silvery mantle outside the shop, which made him strangely enough relax. Lockhart put his arm around Harry's shoulders, clamping him tightly to his side.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," – Lockhart said loudly, waving for quiet. "What an extraordinary moment this is! The perfect moment has come for me to make an announcement I've been sitting on for some time."

"When young Harry entered Flourish and Blotts today he only wanted to buy my autobiography – which I will present him with now, free of charge," the crowd applauded again, "However, he had no idea that soon he would be getting more than just my set of books, Magical Me. He and his schoolmates will, in fact, be getting the real magical me. Yes, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with great pleasure and pride that I announce now that I will be taking, this September, the position of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

The crowd cheered and clapped while Harry found himself with the entire collection of Lockhart's books. Staggering slightly from the weight of the books, Harry moved to the edge of the room where Ginny was standing next to her new cauldron.

"You can have these," – He mumbled at her. "I will be my own..."

"Bet you loved this Potter!" – said a voice Harry could hardly not recognize. He straitened up and faced Malfoy, who had his usual sneer.



"Oh, hey, Malfoy, fancy seeing you here." – Harry said with a mock in his voice. "Came for an autograph?"

"You wish," – Malfoy snarled. "Famous Harry Potter can't get into a bookshop without being on the front page."

"Yeah, it is the burden of being famous," – Cassie replied cheerfully instead of Harry. "You aren't jealous, are you?"

"Not at all!" – Malfoy snapped.

"Leave him alone, he didn't want this!" – Ginny suddenly said while glaring at him.

"Oh, Potter, you got a girlfriend!" – Malfoy said. Ginny went scarlet as Ron and Hermione were making their way through the crowd clutching their stacks of Lockhart's books.

"Oh, it's you!" – Ron said, looking at Malfoy as he was something unpleasant on the sole of his shoe. "Bet you are surprised of seeing Harry here?"

"Not as surprised as I am to see you in a shop, Weasley." – Malfoy retorted. "Bet your parents will go hungry for a month to pay for all those."

Ron also turned red but Harry replied before he could.

"Actually, not Draco. They can buy the shop with everything in it in a single whim but it's not worth it."

"Yeah, given what's inside right now." – Alamar added pointing steadily at Malfoy, "It's deteriorating the price of the shop when you have a schmuck in it."

Xsi and Cassie burst into laughter, Hermione and Ron joined them. This time Malfoy turned red. He did not enjoy being mocked publicly.

"No one asked for your opinion, Darkstoner." – Malfoy snarled angrily.

"Oh really?" – Alamar could barely hold his composure.

Arthur and Molly were making their way through to the children.

"Well, well, Arthur Weasley,"

It was Malfoy Senior. He stood his hand on Draco's shoulder, sneering in just the same way.

"Lucius," – Arthur said, nodding coldly.

"Busy time at the Ministry, I hear." – Mr. Malfoy said. "All those raids, I hope they pay you overtime...?"

He reached into Ginny's cauldron and extracted from amid the glossy Lockhart's books, a pair of not so new copies of transfiguration books.

"Obviously not," – Mr. Malfoy said. "Dear me, what's the point of being a disgrace to the name of wizard if they don't even pay you well for it?"

"You and I have a very different idea what disgraces the name of wizard, Malfoy." – Arthur retorted.

"Clearly," – Malfoy sneered, his pale eyes straying to Mr. and Mrs. Granger, "The company you keep, Weasley...and I thought your family could not sink any lower..."

Arthur turned red just as his children and was about to burst when Harry spotted again the silvery mantle and a tiny dark smile appeared on his face.

"The same could be said for you as well, maggot." – Someone said with barely audible whisper but which carried a notion of a threat. Lucius jumped off as though hit by a whim. He swiftly turned around and came face to face with Lord Solmyr, who was staring at him with dangerously flickering eyes.

"How..., Lord Solmyr!" – Mr. Malfoy mumbled, humbled at once.

Lord Solmyr was wearing dark red robes and his official silvery mantle, clutching in his hand a dark stoned cane with a head of a dragon.

"It is always a pleasure meeting you, Lord Solmyr." – Mr. Malfoy said quickly with an oily voice.

"Indeed, it is." – Lord Solmyr said calmly but the threat was still noticeable in his voice.

"Come on, Draco." – Mr. Malfoy turned to his son then added. "Here girl, take your book, it's clearly the best your father can give you."

Mr. Malfoy, who was still holding the transfiguration book, thrust it at Ginny before he left with Draco. Lord Solmyr looked after them with still sparkling eyes.

"Dangerous man," – Lord Solmyr whispered. "You should've ignored him, Arthur."

"I would have crushed him..." – Arthur said through teeth.

"And what example would this have set before the children, ah?" – Molly asked.

"The right one, dear, the right one." – Arthur replied with fury in his voice. "Sometimes, you have to crush their faces with your bare hands."

"A fine example – sure!" – Molly exclaimed disapprovingly.

"Arthur, " – Lord Solmyr called. "You shouldn't mess with the Malfoys. They are bad blood and bad example for the name of a wizard. Next time, just ignore them."

"Thant, what are you doing here?" – Harry asked.

"Can't I come to say hi?" – Lord Solmyr replied with a question.

"Well, yeah, of course, but you could warn in advance." – Harry smiled.

"And warning you would spoil the surprise, would it not?"

"Well, yeah." – Harry agreed.

The group headed back to the Leaky Cauldron where the Grangers took good-byes with everyone and proceeded to the Muggle Street on the other side. The Weasleys prepared all the shopping for immediate transfer to the Burrow while Cassie, Xsi, Hermione and Pluto were saying bye to Harry, Ron and Ginny.

"See you at the platform." – Cassie said before vanishing through the emerald flames in the Cauldron's fireplace.

Harry wisely took off his glasses and put them into his pocket, and this time he let Ginny before him, she only smiled.

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 19

### The Pegasus Riders

The summer's vacation came to an end far too quickly for Harry's liking. He was looking to go back to Hogwarts but the summer spent with Ron and his family has proven to be very pleasing and satisfying, not to mention the constant surprises that happened in the house. It is quite a surprise when you face for the first time the mirror, which was not too much unlike the one in the castle but had different jokes every single time, or the noises coming from the attic where the resident ghoul enjoyed making once everyone's gone to bed.

The evening, Molly conjured a sumptuous dinner containing all of Harry's favorite meals. The resident mischievers, Fred and George, used some of Mr. Filibuster's fireworks that bounced up and down red and blue stars. But finally the time came for the last chocolate mug and then it was bedtime.

They all woke up at dawn but somehow it took them a long time to get going. People kept colliding on the staircases and the floors partially dressed with bits of breakfast in their hands. The twins even managed to spill orange juice on the second floor just as Arthur was taking down Ginny's trunk and the logical thing happened. He slipped and reached his destination step by step on his bum. Molly spent some time yelling at the twins but hurried up looking for Percy's and Ron's socks.

Harry who had done his trunk just before going to bed was sitting near the old Ford Anglia already two hours was getting bored. He did help Arthur get Ginny's trunk after his mishap on the stairs. Then when all trunks were ready, Harry decided to voice something that has been bugging him since the start of the morning. He could hardly imagine how eight people, six trunks, two owls and a rat were going to fit in the quite small trunk of the Anglia. But the mystery was revealed once Harry took a peek inside. It seemed that Arthur had enlarged it with magic.

"Not a word to Molly," – Arthur had whispered while putting the last trunk.

Finally all were seated. Fred, George, Harry, Percy and Ron were at the back sitting comfortably and as Molly noticed, "It seems that the muggles have done a better job than we give them credit?" She and Ginny occupied the front seat, which was also expanded so it resembled a park bench that made Molly exclaim again, "You wouldn't say it is that big from the outside, wouldn't you?"

Arthur only smiled but did not bother to answer. He started the engine and they trundled out of the yard before, of course, George and Fred remembered they have forgotten respectively a box of Filibuster's fireworks and a broom. Then they had almost reached for the highway when Ginny remembered she had forgotten her diary. But by the time she was back, they were already running late, and tempers were running high.

Arthur glanced at his watch and then at Molly. "Molly, dear..."

"No!"

"No one would see – this little button here is an Invisibility Booster I installed – that'd get us up in the air – then we fly above the clouds. We'd be there in ten minutes and no one is going to see us. I promise."

"No, Arthur, I said no, not in broad day light." – Molly was firm.

They reached King's Cross station at quarter to eleven. Arthur dashed to get trolleys for the trunks and they all hurried into the station.

Harry had caught the train last year. The tricky part consisted of getting on platform nine and three quarters, which wasn't visible to the muggle eye. What you had to do was to walk through the solid wall dividing platforms nine and ten. It wouldn't hurt but it had to be done carefully so no muggle would see you.

"Percy, darling, you go first." – Molly said, looking nervously at the clock overhead, which showed only five minutes before the departure of the train.

Percy strode briskly and vanished. Arthur, Fred and George went next.

"I'll take Ginny, and you two come right after us." – Molly told Ron and Harry, grabbing Ginny's hand and setting off. In a blink of an eye they were gone.

"Come on, we've got only a minute." – Ron said to Harry.

Harry made sure Hedwig's cage was safely wedge atop his trunk and wheeled his trolley around to face the barrier. A tingling sensation, however, made Harry aware that someone was watching him. He turned briskly around but saw no one.

"What is it?" – Ron asked.

"Nothing, let's go!" – Harry replied.

Both of them bent low over the handles of their trolleys and walked purposefully toward the barrier, gathering speed. A few away from it, they broke into run and CRASH. Both trolleys hit the barrier and bounced forward. Ron's trunk fell with a loud thump and Harry was knocked off his feet. Hedwig's cage bounced onto the floor, and rolled away with Hedwig's shrieks. People all around them stared and a guard nearby yelled, "What the blazes do you think you're doing?"

"Sorry, lost control of the trolley," – Harry gasped, clutching his ribs as he got up to his feet. Ron ran to pick up Hedwig.

"Why can't we get through?" – Harry hissed to Ron.

"I don't know."

Ron looked wildly around. A dozen people were still watching them.

"We are going to miss the train." – Ron whispered. "I don't understand why the gateway sealed itself..."

Harry looked up the giant clock with a sickening feeling in the pit of his stomach. Ten seconds...nine seconds...

He moved his trolley up against the wall and pushed with all his might but nothing happened. Three seconds...two seconds...one second...

"We're done. The train's off." – Ron said stunned. "We've missed it. What if Mum and Dad can't get through? Do you have any muggle money?"

"Come on, let's not dwell here." – Harry said.

And they marched off through the crowd of curious muggles and out of the station. On their way back, Harry and Ron were pondering what to do.

"I can't believe we missed it. What are we going to do?" – Ron said.

"I have an idea." – Harry said.

"What?"

"We'll send Hedwig to Hogwarts explaining what had happened." – Harry explained.

"Great, why didn't I think of it?" – Ron exclaimed.

As they were nearing the side road where the old Ford Anglia was parked, the tingling sensation in Harry's returned. He glanced backwards and this time saw three hooded figures marching behind them.

"Harry, what is it?" – Ron asked concerned.

"We're being followed." – Harry replied trying not to panic. "There – by that car."

Ron looked back and also saw the three men but he also saw three wooden sticks that unavoidably looked like wands coming out of their pockets.

"Wands!" – He shrieked silently but Harry understood.

"I hope you know how to drive the Ford?" – Harry asked.

"I do. Let's hurry."

They increased their pace and soon after they reached the car. Ron quickly moved to the aft of the car, snapped the trunk with series of



taps that then opened the trunk. He hastily placed their heavy luggage back in. Harry put Hedwig on the back seat then sat next to the driver's seat.

Just as Ron joined him, the closest of the figures that were following them arrived around the corner and without losing any time whatsoever shot a red ray at them. The ray missed the car by inches.

"Ron, time to go!" – Harry frantically said.

"Check if someone's watching." – Ron said while starting the engine with another tap.

"No time for this." – Harry said and ducked as the ray beam hit the front window, which by some miracle withstood the blast then in the rear mirror another blasts splashed. The other two pursuers had appeared.

Shivers were running down Harry's neck alongside with some extremely odd feeling. This feeling was also familiar. It brought back the memory of sensing Voldemort though Harry was certain on some level that this sensation was slightly different. Sudden hatred protruded in him making his blood boil with it. And in that tiny, little moment he could actually feel his pursuers. He had not idea why he felt suddenly this way but he surely did not want to find out either. "Ron, let's go!"

"Right," – Ron said and pushed the tiny silver button. As they vanished, Ron stepped on the accelerator. And then the ground and the dirty building on each side fell away, dropping out of sight as the car rose, in seconds, the whole of London lay, smoky and glittering, below them. It was an odd sensation – being able to feel the vibrating seat beneath him, hear the engine, feel his hands on his knees and his glasses on his nose but for all he could see he had become a pair of eyeballs floating in the air. Hopefully, there was no sign of pursuit, for now.

Unfortunately their safety lasted mere minutes before there was a popping noise and the car, Harry and Ron reappeared.

"Damn it," – Ron exclaimed, jabbing the Invisibility Booster. "It's faulty."

Both of them pummeled it. The car vanished but then a few minutes later it flickered and they all reappeared.

"Hold on!" – Ron yelled, slamming his foot at the accelerator; they shot upwards into the low, woolly clouds and everything turned dull and foggy.

"Now what?" – Harry asked, blinking hard at the solid mass of clouds pressing them from all sides.

"We need to find the train so we'd know in which direction we need to go."

"Right," – Harry agreed. "But we have to go down again quickly."

They dropped back beneath the clouds and twisted around in their seats, squinting at the ground.

"There I see it." – Harry exclaimed pointing down at Hogwarts Express as it was streaking below them like a scarlet snake.

"Due north," – Ron said. "We'd have to drop in every hour or so – hold on."

And they shot up through the clouds again. A minute later, they burst out into a blaze of sunlight.

Up there was a different kind of world. The wheels of the car skimmed the sea of fluffy clouds, the sky a bright, endless blue under the blinding white sun.

"Now all we have to worry about would be airplanes." – Ron said.

They looked into each other and burst into laughter and for a long time they couldn't stop.

It was like they were pulled into a fabulous dream. They were passing by swirls and fluffy turrets of snowy clouds, in the car full of hot, bright sunlight, with a fat pack of toffees in the glove compartment, and the thought of Fred and George's jealous faces as they landed gracefully and spectacularly on the sweeping lawn in front of Hogwarts castle.

They continued to make regular checks on the train and each dip showed them a different view. London was soon far behind them, replaced by neat green fields that then turned into purplish moors, a great city alive with cars like multicolored ants and churches like tiny toys.

After several uneventful hours, Harry had to admit that the wondrous world of clouds was starting to lose its charm. The toffees had made them very thirsty but there was nothing to drink. They started to long for ice-cold pumpkin juice they could have had down on the train, some miles below them. Why had they unable to get onto platform nine and three quarters? Of course, there was one far more disturbing thought and it was their pursuers. Why were they after them? Could they be followers of the Dark Lord or something else, something much worse?

Harry kept these thoughts for himself. He didn't want to bother Ron with them as he had to concentrate on driving. Slowly, Harry fell asleep.

"We can't be far." – Ron croaked, after another few hours, as the sun started to sink into their floor of cloud, staining it a deep pink. "We should make another check."

Harry woke up. "Yeah, sure," – He mumbled in agreement.

They made their way past a snowcapped mountain. It was much darker beneath the canopy of clouds. Without any warning, the tingling ran down Harry's neck. The sense of danger had increased exponentially.

"Pull up, quickly." – Harry said but it was too late. Both of them noticed three beams of red light that fortunately bounced off the car's front. Few seconds later, they saw the source of those beams. Three figures like vultures were heading their way. They shot again. Ron frantically turned the wheel. The car veered off.

"Do you have something to write with?" – Harry asked with panic in his voice.

"Here in the glove compartment." – Ron gestured while evading another three beams.

Harry opened the glove compartment and found a small bottle of ink. "That will do."

He turned around to move to the back seat instead he flew there head first slamming into the rear window as Ron had suddenly pulled the car nose up to avoid another set of beams. Of course, trying to write down a letter proved to be something more of a challenge as Ron had to perform miracle turns and swirls to avoid the impending doom.

Ten minutes later, Harry somehow had managed to complete his letter though with a lot of ink stains. He rolled the letter, woke Hedwig while getting her out of her cage and attached the letter to her leg then turned to her: "Hedwig, this is for Professor Dumbledore. Do you understand? Professor Dumbledore. Go quickly and good luck!"

Hedwig gently pinched him on the hand and flew off. Harry looked after her with a sinking heart hoping that she won't get hit otherwise all their hopes will go to hell.

"She's away!" – Harry said. "I hope she gets to Professor Dumbledore in time before it's too late."

"Me too. Hold on!" – Ron yelled while stirring the car into yet another crazy turn evading the beams. "Who are they? And why are they shooting at us?"

"I don't know." – Harry replied. "But it would be best if they don't manage to hit us."

"On that we are in agreement."

The chase continued for half an hour before the engine began to whine making Harry and Ron exchange nervous glances.

"It's probably tired." – Ron said. "It's never been this far before not to mention being chased and shot upon..."

And they both pretended not to notice the whining growing louder and louder as the sky became steadily darker. Their chasers, however, were still behind and shooting from time to time.

"Not far," – Ron said, more to the car than to Harry. "Not far now," and he patted the dashboard. Shortly after, they flew back beneath the clouds to locate a familiar landmark.

"There!" – Harry shouted. Ron also spotted it.

Silhouetted on the dark horizon, high on the cliff stood the many turrets of Hogwarts Castle. They were flying over the lake when the car finally gave up. There was a loud clunk, a splutter, and the engine died completely. Unfortunately this was not their only problem. Their chasers have reappeared and were closing the distance quickly. The car dived in nose first.

Harry and Ron closed their eyes, panic overwhelming them completely. This was the end. There was nothing they could do. The end was near. Two jets of red finally overwhelmed the initial stubbornness of the car and smashed the rear window. Harry and Ron closed their eyes as another beam blew off the front window spreading glass chunks all around.

Gravity increased the car's speed and the wind in the car was becoming unbearable. The polished surface of the lake was growing closer as it was the end of their lives. They wouldn't be able to survive the splash into the lake.

It is said that life passes before your eyes just a moment before your life reaches its end. And Harry and Ron did experience their lives in that little moment suspended in eternity.

Ron, somewhat relieved, felt that the few things he regrets were not being able to make his parents proud and probably not finding a girl to be with though these thoughts were not quite appropriate for a twelve years old boy and of course, a signed autograph of the Chudley Cannons.

Harry, well, he wanted only few things – to chase his step sisters around the castle, to see his home and to be able to say goodbye to the people he loved most notably – Hermione, Saptienna and Ginny. The thought of Ginny had suddenly poured hope in his heart. He opened his eyes and for a tiny second he spotted a glint of gold.

Suddenly, both of them were slammed into the car panel. Ron also opened his eyes. The sight was extraordinary. They were both

starring at the lake's surface as the car seemed suspended just inches from it. Then they noticed glowing white ropes supporting the sides of the car. At the end of the ropes on either side of the car, they saw enormous white horses in silver armor with wings, and on the white, glimmering saddles, clutching a pike in their hands, stalwart riders in shining golden chain-mails and helmets, their eyes glinting like stars.

They looked at Harry and Ron and only nodded. Harry and Ron visibly relaxed but then ducked again as a red beam tore the roof off. Looking frantically up, they saw their unyielding chasers who had reckoned without the riders' reaction. They turned immediately to the threat in the skies above. Beams of blinding light protruded from their pikes. The pursuers split at once but did not give up either. They continued to deliver beams in direction of the car.

The lead rider shouted something and all riders but four formed a line before the car. The four riders that remained pulled the car in opposite direction while the others engaged the pursuers. The skies were immediately illuminated with blinding bolts of pure white and beams of scarlet red. If someone watched from the ground, he would have been blissfully ignorant of its meaning and would have considered it a sudden, beautiful display of playing fireworks.

The four riders then stopped and turned the car back in the castle's direction. Harry and Ron did see a few of their pursuers falling off their brooms. The others scattered and tried to escape but the winged riders pursued. Soon they were victorious.

They returned and formed around the car continuing on their way towards the castle. The racing of both Harry and Ron's hearts slowed. Being in the presence of the riders somehow subdued the panic and replaced it with silent joy.

But something was bothering Harry and was bothering him a lot. Their pursuers had not given up after they lost sight of them at King's Cross station. And there was something that was telling him that they were after him in particular and that poor Ron was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Of course, Ron's brave display was what saved their lives in the time before these silent riders came to their rescue.

Something unexplainable was happening and Harry promised himself to find out what it is. His gut feeling was telling him that the Dark Lord now is the least of his problems. His pursuers had not stopped attacking him even at the foot of Hogwarts so it was clear they did not fear an encounter with its inhabitants. And the question that was haunting him since this began was who are they and what do they want with him?

The riders deposed gently the car with Harry and Ron on the sweeping lawn in front of Hogwarts Castle. The front door had burst open and Harry and Ron saw Professors Dumbledore, McGonagall and Snape running towards them, wands in hand.

They stopped a few meters before the riders. Professor Dumbledore gently gave a nod to their leader and said something in an odd language. The riders' leader answered back. Professor Dumbledore listened carefully but Harry and Ron could clearly see he's unusually grave.

"What are they saying?" – Ron whispered.

"I don't know. I don't understand the language." – Harry whispered back.

The riders' leader finished. Professor Dumbledore looked really concerned. He spoke quickly with Professors McGonagall and Snape. Snape immediately returned to the castle while McGonagall approached the car.

"Get off the car and come with me." – She said. "Leave your trunks here they'll be sent later to your tower."

Harry and Ron exited the car and followed McGonagall. In this moment, time somehow became suspended and the lead rider jumped off his horse. Harry now could take a better look at him. He looked young but only his gray eyes were suggesting that he was much older than he seemed. He wore a shield bearing a crest of big silver tree. He bent a knee before Harry and said with sonorous voice.

"Lord Nimbus, trea ad vesta, Veil Mortis vadia at Gallean!"

Harry stopped unsure as how to answer the phrase he understood almost nothing of. But managed to reply the only way he knew of.

"Veil Mortis, ad celesta et stellia."

To his surprise all the riders dismounted their winged horse bending a knee before him.

"Ah, rise!" – Harry said stuttering.

The riders stood up. The leader approached, bent down a little and gave Harry a feather.

"Bear the feather of the Pegasus, which when in trouble just blow to the sky and we shall come. It has been an honor, Lord Nimbus!"

Then he mounted the Pegasus, bowed and shouted in his unknown language. The riders were back on their Pegasus. Time resumed as though it had never stopped. They saluted for the last time and flew off. Harry and the others looked after them until they vanished into the depths of the night sky.

"You two, go straight to my office." – Professor McGonagall ordained cutting off Ron's question. "And keep silent until I return."

Looking at each other, Harry and Ron headed straight to McGonagall's office. There they waited in silence. Some minutes later, Professor McGonagall returned with Professor Dumbledore. They both sat before Harry and Ron.

"Where did you find the car?" – McGonagall asked. "And what happened?"

Harry swallowed and explained that the barrier sealed itself when they tried to pass through.

"Why didn't you send us an owl?"

And Harry told them that they had the intention of sending Hedwig, of course, not in front of all the muggles but when they were back at the car but then appeared the three hooded figures that had followed them and when they saw their wands they did the only thing that remained - they jumped into the car however not before a



few beams bounced off the windows. Then they darted in the sky as quickly as possible. They were afraid after all. But in all the hiatus they had forgotten to send Hedwig to Hogwarts to inform of their situation. As they were nearing the school they were shot upon by those people whoever they were again so they had to do everything possible to dodge the red beams. And then Harry explained that he did send Hedwig. But then just mere ten minutes later the car gave up and fell to the lake when they were rescued by the Pegasus riders who subsequently fought the chasers off.

Professor Dumbledore looked at them for a long time. Professor McGonagall also did not speak. They were both troubled by these events that much was clear for Harry and Ron. Professor Dumbledore understood that the boys did not really have a choice in the circumstances though he was very concerned. The boys were attacked, probably, by dark wizards who did not veer off even when they were so close to Hogwarts. This bore much concern.

"Very well," – Dumbledore said finally. "Minerva, take care of them, and then send them to Gryffindor tower."

"Of course, Professor Dumbledore." – McGonagall said.

"Professor," – Harry called.

"Yes, Harry?"

"Did you learn the identity of those who attacked us?"

"No, the riders did not say. Rest now."

Professor Dumbledore left the office but Harry and Ron were now wondering what would happen to them. They looked questioningly at Professor McGonagall.

"Gryffindor will not lose points and you won't be punished. Under the circumstances, you have acted the only way you could, although, I must impress to both of you the seriousness of using an enchanted car."

"Hugh?"

Professor McGonagall did not answer but unrolled today's issue of the Evening Prophet.

"You were seen." – She said showing them the headlines: FLYING FORD ANGLIA MYSTIFIES MUGGLES! She read aloud: "Two muggles in London convinced they saw an old car flying over the Post Office tower...at noon in Norfolk, Mrs. Hetty Bayliss, while hanging out her washing...Mr. Angus Fleet, of Peebles, reported to the police...six or seven muggles in all. Also I will be writing to both your families about what had happened. And I must warn you if you are ever to do something like it, you will be expelled."

"Understood," – Harry said. Then Ron turned to Professor McGonagall and asked. "Ah, Professor, I was hoping to be able to see my sister being sorted..."

"The sorting ceremony is over." – McGonagall said. "Your sister is also in Gryffindor."

"Great." – Ron exclaimed.

Professor McGonagall raised her wand pointing at her desk. A large plate of sandwiches, two silver goblets and a jug of iced pumpkin juice appeared with a pop.

"You will eat here and then go straight up to your dormitory." – She said. "I must return to the feast."

When the door closed behind her, Ron let out a long, low whistle.

"You know I thought we'd had it." – He said, grabbing a sandwich.

"Yeah, I had the same feeling." – Harry agreed but did not touch the sandwich. Something else was bothering him – their chasers. He had had all evening the distinct feeling he knew who they were. Well, not dark wizards, but something much worse.

"Harry, why couldn't we get through the barrier?" – Ron asked while taking on another sandwich.

Harry shrugged. "I don't know, Ron. But we need to watch our step from now on, though." – Harry said, grabbing also a sandwich and pouring some pumpkin juice. "Wish we could be up to the feast..."

"McGonagall did not want us showing off." – Ron said sagely. "Doesn't want people to think it's clever, arriving by flying car and escort of Pegasus Riders."

When they had finished eating as many as sandwiches as they could, as the plate kept refilling itself, they stood up and left the office, going along the familiar path to Gryffindor tower. The castle was quiet. It seemed the feast was over. They walked past muttering portraits, creaking suits of armor, and climbed narrow flights of stone stairs till they reached, finally, the passage where the secret entrance to the Gryffindor tower was hidden, behind an oil painting of a very fat woman in a pin silk dress.

"Password?" – She said as they approached.

"Er – " – Harry said. They didn't know the New Year's password, not having yet met a Gryffindor prefect, but help came almost immediately. They heard hurrying feet behind them and turned to face Hermione dashing toward them.

"There you are! Where have you been? You got us all worried not to mention the ridiculous rumors – someone said you've been expelled for arriving in a flying car."

"Well, we're neither expelled nor punished." – Harry assured her.

"You're not telling me you did fly here?" – Hermione asked, sounding astoundingly like McGonagall when severe.

"Skip the lecture." – Ron said impatiently. "And tell us the new password."

"Not until you answer me!" – Hermione stood her ground.

"Well, would you like the long story or the short one?" – Harry replied with a question.

"The short for a start." – Hermione said.

"Alright, the short: - King's Cross – mysterious hooded figures – jets of red beam – heart stopping chase in the skies, almost crushing and thus dying in the lake and Pegasus Riders." – Harry recited

while Hermione was trying to determine whether Harry wasn't pulling her leg or not. "Oh, so the short – oh Merlin, Merlin, we almost kissed the surface of the lake and thus our mortal coils goodbye. How about that?"

"What?" – Hermione was definitely confused now.

"The long version then?" – Ron smiled. "After you give us the password of course."

"Would you care to make any sense?" – Hermione asked.

"Ron, would you?" – Harry said sounding almost sarcastically. "It seems we would be spending the night here."

"Sure." – Ron agreed and delivered the story in a rather darker tone than it actually was but the effect on Hermione was immediate and quite visible on her face. She looked very pale and quite sickened by the end of it.

"In Merlin's beard," – She stuttered. "You were very lucky..."

"Yes, yes, we were. Now would be so kind to tell us the password before we die of old age?" – Ron interrupted impatiently.

"Don't say that!" – Hermione exclaimed shocked.

"Hermione!" – Both shouted.

"Yes, it's wattlebird."

"Thank Merlin!" – Both exclaimed and hurried inside. Hermione was for sure to say something but she was cut short from the sudden eruption of ovations coming from the inside. It looked as though the entire Gryffindor was still awake, packed into the common room, standing on the lopsided tables and squashy armchairs waiting for them to arrive. Arms stretched and pulled Harry and Ron inside, leaving Hermione to scramble in alone.

"Brilliant!" – Lee Jordan yelled. "Inspired! What an entrance! Flying a car to Hogwarts, grazing the surface of the lake and landing at the front door, people will be talking about it for years to come..."

Fred and George pushed their way through the crowd saying together. "Why couldn't you call us to come along, eh?"

Ron was obviously scarlet in the face, grinning embarrassedly, but Harry was not. He clearly remembered how close they came to cease existing, and he also spotted Percy heading their way so he nudged Ron into the ribs, nodding in Percy's direction. Ron got the point at once.

"Got to get upstairs – bit tired." – He said, and the two of them pushed their way through toward the door on the other side that led up a spiral staircase to their dormitory.

"Night," – Harry wished Hermione who looked quite distressed.

They managed to reach the other side of the common room, still having their backs slapped, and gained the peace of the staircase.

They hurried up to the top and at last reached the door of their old dormitory where a sign now said: Second Years. They entered into the familiar, circular room, with its five four-posters hung with red velvet and its high narrowed windows. Their trunks had already been brought up for them, standing at the feet of their beds.

Ron grinned guiltily at Harry. "I know I shouldn't have enjoyed it but..."

The dormitory door flung open and in came the other second year Gryffindor boys, Seamus Finnigan, Dean Thomas and Neville Longbottom.

"Unbelievable!" – Seamus beamed.

"Cool!" – Dean exclaimed.

"Amazing." – Neville added.

Harry couldn't help it. He grinned, too.

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 20

### Rebellious Flames

Harry and his classmates fell asleep but outside the castle near the forest twelve hooded figures have just gathered. Standing still as statues it appeared they were waiting for something or someone. It was not long until two more figures appeared from the north side of the castle. They headed straight to the others. The whole group moved into the shadows of the forest.

"Has anyone noticed our presence?" – A bass voice asked.

"No, milord," – A rather shrilled voice answered. "The wizards have not sensed us. The diversion we created with those damned Riders provided the necessary distraction Lord Cornelius was hoping for. We have twelve more hunters. I've told them to spread equally around the castle. We must keep a low profile as Lord Cornelius has commanded."

"Excellent," – The bass voice said satisfied.

"But what do you do when we run out?" – Another voice joined in.

"Well, then, we'll take." – The bass voice replied. "But, remember, take not kill."

"Not kill?"

"We have to keep a low profile. You take a little and then use the memory charm to erase your presence from sad freshly. Is this understood?"

"Yes, milord."

"And remember that capturing the boy alive is our priority. If someone kills him, Lord Cornelius is personally going to kill that sad one. Clear?"

"Yes," – Everyone whispered.

"Good, now disperse and wait for the perfect opportunity."

The hooded figures spread and soon vanished in different direction and the only the bass voiced figure remained. The day of the grand payback was closing by and the wizards were going to be the first ones to go and then the wretched Necromancers.

The next morning, Harry and his classmates had very little to smile about. It began in the Great Hall where the ceiling was covered in grey, dark clouds and continued with the worst schedule ever. Professor McGonagall was its bearer. Firstly, Gryffindors had double Herbology with Hufflepuffs.

Ron, Hermione and Harry left together, passed across the vegetable patch and made for the greenhouses, where the magical plants were. Nearing the greenhouses, they noticed the Hufflepuffs and Gryffindors gathered around Professor Sprout who was impatiently listening to Lockhart's lecture.

Professor Sprout was a squat little witch who wore patched hat over her flyaway hair. Her clothes were all covered in earth. Lockhart, on the other hand, was immaculate in sweeping robes of turquoise, his golden hair shining underneath the turquoise hat with golden trimming.

"Hello there." – Lockhart said beaming at everyone around. "I've just been explaining to Professor Sprout the right way to deal with some of her plants so they could be way more productive. But don't think that I know more than her – no, I've just had pleasure to have met some of those exotic plants on my travels..."

"Greenhouse three, boys and girls." – Professor Sprout said quite disgruntled, not like her usual cheerful self.

All students started murmuring as they had only ever worked in greenhouse one. But greenhouse three housed far more interesting and dangerous plants. Professor Sprout opened the greenhouse door with a large key she took out of her belt. Harry was about to follow Ron and Hermione in when Lockhart's hand shot out.

"Harry, I've been wanting a word – you don't mind if he's a couple of minutes late, do you, Professor Sprout?"

Professor Sprout scowled but this did not seem to bother Lockhart at all. "This is the ticket," – He said and closed the door at her face.

"Harry," – Lockhart said, his large teeth gleaming in the sunlight as he shook his head. "Harry, Harry, Harry!"

Harry completely nonplussed, said nothing, waiting for the Professor to continue.

When I heard – well, of course, it was my entire fault. Could have kicked myself."

Harry's perplexity grew with every minute as he had absolutely no clue what Lockhart was babbling about but Gilderoy continued. "Don't know when I've been more shocked. Flying a car to Hogwarts. Well, I knew at once why you've done it. Stood out a mile. Harry, Harry..."

It was remarkable even for Harry how Lockhart could show all his white teeth even when he wasn't speaking.

"I gave you a taste of publicity." – Lockhart said. "Gave you the bug. You got onto the front page with me and you couldn't wait to do it again."

Harry looked at the Professor trying to determine whether he was serious or he was making a joke given what had happened. However, it seemed to Harry that Lockhart had chosen to see only that which he considered they might have had in common should their places been reversed. So he did not bother saying anything, instead he let Gilderoy continue.

"Harry, Harry, Harry!" – Lockhart continued, this time grabbing Harry by the shoulders. "I understand. Naturally, you wanted a bit more once you'd the first taste – I blame myself for giving this taste, because it was bound to inevitably turn your head. But young man, you can't simply start flying with a car and get yourself noticed. Just calm it down, alright? You'll have plenty of time for all that when you're older. Yes, I know what you're thinking. 'He's an internationally famous wizard already!' But at your age I was just as much of a nobody as you are now. Well, not that much of a nobody, I mean a few people know of you, all this business with He-who-must-not-be-named." – Harry finally understood him but continued his silent run. "I know, I know – it's not like winning Witch Weekly's



Most Charming Smile Award five times in a row but it is a start, Harry. It is a start."

He gave Harry a hearty wink and went away. Harry stood rooted for a while. Now Harry understood what all this nonsense was about but still was trying to figure out whether it required of him to laugh or to cry. He was not sure which would be the most appropriate. This wizard had an unusual opinion about himself. He just hoped he is not as great in the art of wizardry as he is in talking how great is winning the Smiling Award five times in a row. Harry, suddenly, remembered that he should be in class, so he opened the door of the greenhouse and was about to slip when the unpleasant tingling sensation returned.

He swiftly took defensive stance and turned around. His eyes began frantically to sweep the surroundings. Taking his wand and he moved away from the door. He did not understand the nature of this danger and in years to come he probably would not be able to explain what he was expecting to achieve since he did not have even the slightest clue what he would have done should he had faced the danger. Hopefully, the feeling soon passed. He sensed his heart racing and his front sweating. He took a deep breath and tried to relax.

Ron showed up at the door. "Harry, are you coming?"

Harry did not reply at first as the sensation returned this time closer. He barely sensed Ron pulling his sleeve.

"Harry?" – But when Ron looked at him he understood quickly something was bothering Harry. "Again?"

Harry did not bother to reply but nodded. Ron also looked frantically around.

"We have to tell someone." – Ron said. "Let's go inside and warn Professor Sprout.

"We don't have time for that." – Harry's hoarse voice interrupted.

"Harry?" – Ron asked but had no time to react as out of nowhere two jets of red light dashed straight at them and missed them by an inch. Unfortunately, another two jets appeared and this time did not

miss. Both of them were struck down and lost immediately consciousness.

Harry opened his eyes and though his vision was blurry he noticed a crowd around him. Someone was shouting something but he did not understand a word. Everything became a little clearer when someone actually placed his glasses back on. Professor Sprout was hovering over him with some vial of colorless liquid, probably water.

He managed to sit up and turned his head around just in time to see Ron stirring. Minutes later, they were both on their feet.

"What happened?" – Harry heard Hermione's voice.

Ron was about to answer when Harry cut in. "Ron came looking for me and I guess we collided in each other."

"What kept you outside for so long?"

"Lockhart."

"Are you alright, Potter?" – Professor Sprout asked.

"Yes, I'm fine." – Harry lied.

"You still look a bit pale. Maybe you should go see Madame Pomfrey?"

"There is no need, Professor. I'm fine." – Harry said firmly.

"Alright then, back inside, the lot of you." – Professor Sprout turned to the rest of the students.

Ron looked at Harry but said nothing, which relieved Harry for the moment. There will be a time to discuss what really happened. However, Harry did not feel the urge to scare the willies out of everyone for now. It was their first day and besides the explanation was going to be crazy at best. There was no need to introduce panic and fear now.

As everyone gathered inside, Sprout said, "As I was saying today we are going to repot Mandrakes and as we established given Mr. Darkstone's explanation the Mandrakes are essential part of most

antidotes used to restore cursed or transfigured people back to their original state. The Mandrakes are also dangerous. Can anyone tell me why?"

Hermione's and Alamar's hands flew in the air but Alamar, playing the gentleman, let her answer. There was a short moment of awkwardness, which prompted Hermione to blush.

"The mandrake's cry is futile to anyone who hears it." – She said promptly.

"Excellent ten points to Gryffindor," – Professor Sprout said. "Now, these Mandrakes are still babies so their cry will not kill anyone but they are sufficient to knock you out for several hours, which is why I have provided you with a pair of earmuffs." – Professor Sprout pointed at the twenty or so multicolored earmuffs sitting on the trestle bench next to her. "Take your earmuffs and gather around." – Professor Sprout instructed.

There was a scramble as everyone reached for the earmuffs that weren't pink or too fluffy but inevitably Neville ended with one just like it.

"When I tell you, you will put the earmuffs on. Make sure they cover your ears completely." – Professor Sprout explained. "When it is safe to remove them, I will give you thumbs up. Right – earmuffs on."

Everyone put their earmuffs on. Professor Sprout then rolled her sleeves up, grasped one of the tuft plants firmly and pulled out.

Everyone gasped hopefully no one heard the others as the earmuffs were cutting out all sound. Only one of the students had dropped but no one noticed it at the moment.

Instead of roots, a small, moody and extremely ugly baby popped out of the earth. The leaves were growing right out of its head. It had pale green, molted skin, and was clearly bawling at the top of his lungs.

Professor Sprout took a large pot from under the table and plunged the Mandrake in it, burying him into dark, damp compost until only

the tufted leaves were visible. Professor Sprout dusted her hands, gave them thumbs up, and removed her own earmuffs.

"As our Mandrakes..." – She was saying as Seamus interrupted.

"Professor Sprout, Neville is out." – He said looking at his fallen friend.

Professor Sprout ran to him. She checked on Neville and sighed relieved. "He's only knocked out. That boy never listens. Oh, well, leave him here."

She returned to the pot with the mandrake.

"As I was saying, our Mandrakes are only seedlings. However, be sure your earmuffs are covering fully your ears or you might miss your first day as is Mr. Longbottom." – She explained. "Now, you will be four at a tray – there is a large supply of pots here and compost in the sacks over there. Make sure you avoid the Venomous Tentacula, it's teething while I take Mr. Longbottom to the hospital wing."

As she was explaining she gave a sharp slap to a spiky, dark red plant making it withdraw its large long feelers that it had sneaked over her shoulder.

Harry, Ron and Hermione came to a tray with curly haired Hufflepuff boy Harry had not previously spoken to.

"Justin Finch-Fletchley." – The boy said brightly, shaking hands with Harry. "Know who you are of course, the famous Harry Potter...and you are Hermione Granger – always top in everything," – Justin bent over and added in a less loud tone. "You're better than Alamar; he is just a show off." – Hermione beamed as she had her hand shaken too. "And Ron Weasley. Wasn't the flying car yours?"

Ron did not beam or smiled as he remembered that it was not a very pleasant experience by the end. He and Harry had agreed not to smile too much about it. This of course did not stop Justin who continued to speak just as brightly.

"That Lockhart's something, isn't he?" – Justin continued as they began filling in their pots with the compost. "Have you read his

books? They're awesome. I'd tell you I'd died if I was cornered in a telephone booth by a werewolf but he remained cool and zap..."

"My name came down for Elton, you know. I can't tell you how difficult was to persuade my mother but after I gave her Lockhart's books she understood how important is to have a fully trained wizard in the family."

Justin continued babble was starting to be irritating but hopefully they had to repot the Mandrakes so this gave Harry, Ron and Hermione the perfect excuse not to answer to him. Repotting the Mandrakes proved not as easy as it had seemed. Apparently, the Mandrakes did not like being removed from their pots thus they were resisting fully. Curiously enough they did not want to go in the other pots either. Harry spent five very difficult minutes trying to put a particularly fat one into the pot.

By the end of the class, Harry just like the rest of his classmates was sweaty and exhausted. Everyone traipsed for a quick wash to the castle and then the Gryffindors went straight into class with Professor McGonagall except Harry.

Soon enough, she noticed that Harry was missing.

"Where is Mr. Potter?" – She asked.

Everyone turned around and the professor noticed that they were not aware he was even missing.

"He was right behind us." – Hermione said.

Ron noticed Harry's absence the moment he had sat down. He looked apprehensive for a moment hoping that he not had gone after whatever hit them in front of greenhouse 3. Professor McGonagall hopefully did not notice his odd behavior as she had dashed already out to look for Harry, of course not before barking, "Open your books. No one is to leave the cabinet."

Harry, on the other hand, had gone straight to the library. While he was walking to it, he amusedly thought of how unusual this act is for him but he had to find out what was going on. He had no time to lose for who knows when this threat was going to reappear. Although, the best thing he should have done would have been to

inform a teacher. But some undefined feeling was prompting him to go alone on this one.

He reached the library and found, obviously, no one as everyone was in class. Madame Pins was nowhere to be seen, which was good. Harry quickly found Madame Pin's list of where everything was and scanned it, quickly locating what he needed or at least what he thought might be it. He hurried to remove the necessary books then placed them under the cloak and vacated the library. He headed straight to the owlry where no one would think to look for him and where he will find the necessary peace. He, of course, realized that he is going to pay for missing out deliberately McGonagall's class but right now did not really care.

He reached the owl's dome undisturbed. The owls paid almost no attention to his presence. He found a niche that concealed him from the entrance so if any came looking for him he would not see him at first.

He opened the books and began his search for answers. No one bothered him in the next few hours. He knew he had missed his classes for the day but his research seemed much more important. He had to know more about the Necromancers and their past. Well, it is true he knew some things about them but it seemed not sufficient given he was attacked twice in his first year and now again trice.

He did learn a great deal but unfortunately the information in the books he had snatched were written by wizards so the information however interesting was incomplete. Harry had too many questions that remained unanswered. But how to obtain the answers he was seeking? These books were giving some answers though not the ones he needed. He needed someone capable of answering his questions without him, himself asking why Harry was so interested.

Harry glanced at his watch noticing the time. He should go back and face the consequences of his decision for rebellion. But before he needed to return the books but then he had to explain why he took them in the first place. This was a dilemma for him but the solution to it came quickly enough.

He simply whispered. "Kaiser!"

A loud crack and the Solmyr's family crazy house elf number one appeared. "Master Nimbus!" – He croaked and bowed to the stone floor.

"Yes, Kaiser, I need you to put these books back into the library without anyone seeing you." – Harry said and then having another thought quickly added. "And you are not to tell or discuss it with anyone directly and indirectly or comment yourself. Just do it."

"Yes, master Nimbus!" – Kaiser bowed and vanished with another crack.

Harry was satisfied. Kaiser and Casper had come to respect him as their true master despite the fact that they previously obeyed only Cassie and Xsi.

Harry ventured out and returned to the castle. He headed straight to the Great Hall but on the way met the very distressed and angry looking McGonagall. He stopped abruptly.

"My office, now!" – McGonagall commanded nostrils flared up.

Harry obeyed without any protest. He entered her office and waited. He did not sit down as he was not invited to anyway. McGonagall swiftly closed the door, sat behind the desk and stared at him.

"Where have you been, Mr. Potter?" – She asked. "Why weren't you in class?"

"I did not feel like going in class today," – Harry bluntly replied but added quickly. "Professor."

"Why?"

"It just felt the right thing to do. I wanted to have a little straw and think about my popularity as Professor Lockhart suggested." – Harry had a horrible idea. "He did suggest that I showed off a bit with the car entrance so I thought maybe I could find another way to gain his respect while not outshining him completely. After all, the man has won five times the Witch Weekly's Most Charming Smile Award therefore he must know what he is talking about – fame and everything."

Professor McGonagall was staring at Harry in total bemusement of what he was saying. She never thought it possible she would hear Harry say something like that. Not only was that but Harry was displaying a blunt disregard for the rules and signs of teenage rebellion. The Professor was entranced, frozen as she did not know what to say at first. She was caught completely off guard by Harry's answer.

"You should probably give the man more than the world is giving him for encouraging youngsters in following in his footsteps." – Harry continued pouring more oil into the flames. This was his little revenge towards the dear Professor Lockhart. If it was not for the delay he created he and Ron would not have been in danger in the first place. But then again, the Professor's delay did make him aware of the danger crawling around the school. Well, it came to both – a positive effect and a negative one. The world is not perfect as Alamar says.

McGonagall continued to stare at Harry unbelievably. She was still in shock but regained her composure soon enough. She had thought to speak with Professor Lockhart about this.

"Mr. Potter, nothing gives you the right, especially your explanation, to skip classes. Therefore, you will be spending detention for the next month and fifty points will be taken away from Gryffindor and..."

"Gee, that's a relief." – Harry interrupted. "I thought they'd be a hundred."

"That can easily be arranged." – McGonagall raised her voice. "And as I saying I'll be writing to your family."

"Now, I'm scared." – Harry replied eyes flashing. Something in him was telling him to shut up but he couldn't help it. He was feeling quite rebellious.

McGonagall's lips thinned and her nostrils flared even more. The boy's behavior was deteriorating with each passing second. It was so not Harry. It was like she was looking at a completely different person.



"That's two months detention, Mr. Potter." – She did not want to take more points out of Gryffindor otherwise they would have started the year at the lowest ever. "Now you will go straight to class!"

"Yes, M'am." – Harry said and exited before he manages to spill more inappropriate language and thus get into even bigger trouble. He could also hardly believe what has just happened in there. He never thought himself capable of such behavior but there it was. He was acting completely not himself. It was like it was someone else and he was there only to observe. He was stopped and looked in the nearby mirror. He was disgusted of himself. But he thought of the reason why he did it and pulled away. He had to maintain the illusion so he can have more time to solve this mystery. He will find a way to mend fences with McGonagall another time.

He reached the DADA classroom where his classmates were already seated. Apparently he had missed Lockhart's introduction, which was a relief. He slipped in unfortunately it did not go unnoticed.

"Mr. Potter, you decided to join us." – Lockhart's said though he did not expect an answer. He came by and left on his desk a quiz. "You have twenty five minutes." And he strode away.

Harry looked at the questions and almost burst into laughter. This man was indeed self centered maniac. The questions read:

1. What is Gilderoy Lockhart's favorite color?
2. What is Gilderoy Lockhart's secret ambition?

On and on it went until Harry reached the end of the paper, right down to:

54. When are Gilderoy Lockhart's birthday, and what his ideal gift would be?

Harry decided that it was not worth the effort since Lockhart was most likely to provide the answers anyway so he left his pen aside, folded arms and waited patiently for the others to finish. He was of course avoiding eye contact with Ron for the time being besides his mind was preoccupied with other thoughts.

Lockhart noticed Harry's total disregard for his quiz and when the others finished after collecting their papers he got Harry up in front of the class.

"Now Harry, what is my secret ambition?"

Harry's eyes narrowed guessing perfectly Lockhart's intention and normally he would not have bothered to answer but the rebellious flames were still fuming.

"Your secret ambition is to get everyone to floss and after you're kicking the bucket to have yours ...displayed in a frame for the future generations to know what a narcissus no one should ever aspire to be even if it wins the Witch Weekly's Most Charming Smile Award five times in a row." – Harry answered quite courteously.

Silence befell the classroom. No one ever suspect an answer such as this. Ron and Hermione were staring at Harry in total awe and disbelief while Lockhart's jaw had fallen and his usually charming smile was shredded to an ugly wrinkle. He still blinking hard and was at a total loss of words. No one has dared to defy him like that in public before. After a few minutes of total silence, he regained his composure.

"Gryffindor loses ten points, Mr. Potter," – He spat. "And..."

"That's the best you can do?" – Harry asked abruptly interrupting Lockhart. "I guess it's the tides today but you come second. McGonagall has already beaten you in that regard – she awarded fifty less so what's another ten points." – Harry continued. "Please, do continue."

Lockhart was silent for another few minutes completely taken aback by Harry's interruption.

"Detention for a week, starting tonight and..."

"Oh, take your turn. McGonagall booked me for the first two months." – Harry interrupted again.

This came too much for dear Lockhart. "OUT, OUT, AND STRAIGHT FOR PROFESSOR DUMBLEDORE'S OFFICE." – He shrieked.

"With pleasure, Master Smiley." – Harry blurted and exited with a slow pace.

He headed straight for where Dumbledore's office was. He reached the ugly gargoyles. But of course not knowing the password, he leaned against the wall and waited.

Soon, the gargoyles moved and Professor Snape appeared. He stopped abruptly surprised to see Harry.

"What is it this time, Potter?"

"I was sent here by Professor Lockhart, sir." – Harry replied idly.

"In front of the office of the headmaster?"

"No, actually in it but since I haven't got the slightest of the latest candy like password I'm standing in front of it." – Harry replied just as idly.

Snape noticed his tone and was about to spit his answer when Professor Dumbledore appeared.

"Ah, Harry, go and wait in my office."

"Yes, sir." – Harry softened the tone of his answer. He knew that his charade was coming to an end and of course was not about to answer the headmaster in the same manner he was answering previously.

He climbed the winded staircase and ventured through the door. Looking around, Harry realized that Dumbledore's office was definitely the most fascinating one. He was in an oval and spacey room in which strange little sounds filled the air. On low tables, there were odd instruments with unclear purpose that hummed and let off tiny clouds of steam. The walls were covered with portraits of the previous Hogwarts headmasters that were dozing off between the frames. There was a big, clawed desk and behind it perched on a shelf stood a rather frayed, knitted hat – the Sorting Hat.

He pondered for a second whether to put it on but finally chose not to. He turned around and saw that after all he was not alone.

Perched on a bar there was a frail bird that looked like poorly plucked turkey. Harry fixed his gaze on the poor looking creature and bird stared back.

The door of the office opened and Dumbledore entered. Harry turned around and faced him.

"Professor,"

"I have spoken with Professors McGonagall and Lockhart, Harry." – Dumbledore said quietly. The disappointment in his voice was noticeable. "What prompted you to act like that?"

Harry felt that he should not answer this but he did it anyway. "It's none of your business, Professor."

Dumbledore was taken aback by Harry's answer. Something was clearly disturbing the young boy that much was clear. Usually, post traumatic stress is the common occurrence after a life threatening ordeal such as Harry and Ron's entrance to Hogwarts but this was pushing it a bit as Ron was not showing such symptoms.

"I'm only trying to understand, Harry." – Dumbledore said softly. "I'm trying to help."

"The best you can do is stay out of my way." – Harry's eyes flashed dangerously. But then Harry stepped back. He just realized he was crossing the line.

Apparently, the near death experiences had pushed him beyond the edge of sanity and he was saying things he really did not mean. It was sure that Professor Dumbledore can help but the undefined feeling, still strong in him, was the main engine of his sudden change of behavior and totally uncharacteristic defiance. The not so distant dread that has been chasing him since King's Cross was turning him into something even he had hard time recognizing. But he was feeling that it was after him and he had to deal with it without any interference. So he stepped forward reaffirming his composure and the dangerous flashing returned in his eyes and thus his uncommon defiance – no matter how much it was going to cost him.

"It's not your business, old man. My problems are my own. Deal with it!"

Dumbledore's eyebrows knitted though he did not look angry but rather concerned. He could hardly recognize Harry. Something was definitely pushing the boy in the wrong direction. He clearly saw that Harry is realizing it when he stepped back but in the end the uncharacteristic defiance won over. He realized that pressing Harry will not yield at any good. Actually, it might push him even further over board.

"Very well, Harry," – Dumbledore said still softly. "Gryffindor point's removal is hereby revoked. But you will serve one week detention. You may return now to Gryffindor's Tower."

Harry did not bother to thank or reply in any kind of manner though he was a bit surprised by Dumbledore's decision. He left the headmaster's office but did not head to the tower. Instead he sneaked outside using a short cut. He stopped outside and leaned against the wall to catch his breath. His heart was racing. He could not believe what just had happened. He would have never dreamt it possible to speak or act in such a way. But here it was. Something was happening with him, something he could not control. And it was taking him in a direction he did not like at all.

He took another deep breath. He had to control himself but the rebel fumes in him were stronger and anger unlike any before was consuming him. The sensation was stronger than the one he felt last year.

Harry stepped away from the castle's wall. He reentered into the castle and without any incident reached Gryffindor Tower. He did not speak with anyone, not even with Ron.

For a week, Harry tried to maintain control over the fumes and burring himself into study seemed to help but just a little. When Saturday came along, Harry's new found peace was tested and Harry lost the battle. Oliver Wood, Gryffindor's Quidditch captain, woke him very early on.

"Whatsthematter?" – Harry asked groggily.

"Quidditch practice!" – Oliver exclaimed. "Come on!"

Harry squinted at the window. There was a thin mist hanging across the pink-and-gold sky.

"Oliver, it's the crack of dawn." – Harry protested.

"Exactly!" – Wood said. He was a tall and burly sixth year, and, at the moment, his eyes were gleaming with a crazed enthusiasm. "It's part of our new training program. No team has begun yet training so we would be the first to start...Come on!"

Yawning and shivering, Harry managed to slip off the bed, and look for his Quidditch robes.

"Good man!" – Oliver said. "I'll meet you on the field in fifteen minutes."

Oliver vanished while Harry looked for his robes that he soon found and put on. He took his Nimbus 2000 on shoulder hoping that the best thing in the world he enjoyed most would not betray his new found control. He had just managed to reach the portrait hole when there was a clatter behind him. It was Colin Creevey.

He had met Colin the next day after the debacle. It was a small, mousy-haired boy that had been staring at Harry transfixed, and who went red when he was spotted. He had approached slowly but enthusiastically. He was clutching in his hands an ordinary Muggle camera.

"Hi, I...I'm Colin Creevey." – He had begun breathlessly. "I'm in Gryffindor too. Do you think, I could...er...if it is alright with you – take a picture with you?"

"Take a picture with me?"

"Yeah, so I can prove I've met you." – Colin answered eagerly. "I know everything about you. Everyone's told me of course. I know how you survived You-Know-Who and how he disappeared afterwards, and how you still have a lightening scar on your forehead (Colin's eyes raked at Harry's hairline) and a boy in my dormitory said that if I develop the film in the right potion, the pictures will move." – Colin drew a great shuddering breath and his words flew again at top speed as the world's end was near. "It's amazing here, isn't it? I never knew all the odd stuff I could is magic

till I received the letter from Hogwarts. Me dad is a milkman so he couldn't believed it too. So I'm taking as much pictures as I can to send home to him. And it'll be great if I can have one with you." – He threw Harry an almost pleading look. "Maybe your friend can take it and I could stand next to you? And then could you sign it?"

At that point Harry had looked at him with sheer surprise, which Colin immediately had misinterpreted. Draco Malfoy, Harry's nemesis, who at the time was passing decided to take advantage of the situation and shouted: "Potter's giving autographs. Get in line!"

This unfortunate display was about to attract the wrong people and Harry had to act quickly before it becomes a circus.

"Actually, Colin," – Harry had turned to Colin, carefully choosing his words. "My agent in these matters is Draco, here." – Harry had pointed at Malfoy who was taken aback by the sudden change of tactics. "So I will be happy to take a picture with you as long as you stand between us. I want to be fair to my faithful and excellent marketing agent."

Draco had logically gone red at once but Colin was beaming with happiness and that was the end of it for a while.

But there he was yet again Colin just as Harry was starting to think that Oliver's bright new idea could actually yield at something positive. The problem was that Colin had been testing Harry's delicate patience for over a week unfortunately Harry was not winning the battle. Every time Harry was coming very close to losing it.

He looked at Colin who beamed back and said:

"I heard someone mentioning your name, Harry" – Colin panted. "Look what I've got here. I had it developed."

Harry looked bemusedly at him. Colin showed him the photograph. He saw a black-white Colin jumping between himself smiling with a devious smile and the very frustrated Malfoy. They were all waving – Harry with a hand and Malfoy with a fist pointed at the camera. The picture managed to cheer Harry for a microsecond but then he remember he has to be on the Quidditch field, turned around and proceeded with all haste there.

Colin naturally followed him all the way asking different questions as to where he was going but Harry did not bother to answer. Unfortunately, Colin made the logical conclusion and Harry was subjected to an inquisition of questions. He made the mistake of answering once and Colin continued like a faulty juke-box to ask even more questions.

Harry managed to ditch Colin at the changing room. The rest of the Gryffindor team was already there. Wood was the only one truly awake. Fred and George Weasley were sitting, puffy-eyed and tousle haired, next to the forth year Alicia Spinnet, who seemed to be nodding off against the wall behind her. Her fellow chasers Katie Bell and Angelina Johnson were yawning side by side.

"There you are Harry. What kept you?" – Oliver said briskly and not expecting an answer continued. "I've spent the entire summer devising a whole new training program so we'll spend some time here before going to the field. This new program will make a difference, believe me..."

And thus Oliver began. He had drawn a map of the field and filled with Quidditch brooms and different circles and maneuvers and how they moved on the field. The first lecture went on for twenty long minutes, which only explained the first board and then Oliver showed a second, and a third and a forth. Harry did fall back to sleep.

"So," – Oliver said, at long last, jerking Harry from a wistful fantasy about what he could be eating at breakfast at this very moment. "Is that clear? Any questions?"

"I've got a question, Oliver." – George said. "Why couldn't you have told us all these yesterday when we were awake?"

Oliver was obviously not pleased.

"Now, you listen to me all." – He began. "We should have won the cup last year. We're easily the best team but due to unforeseeable circumstances we didn't."

Last year, due to Harry's encounter with Voldemort, he was unable to play and thus the team lost.



"So this year, we will train harder than ever before...Let's go and put our new theories into practice." – Oliver shouted, and seizing his broom, leading the team onto the Quidditch field.

They quickly discovered that they had been in the lockers for a long time as the sun was already up. As Harry walked onto the field, Ron and Hermione were already sitting in the stands. But Harry avoided looking at them. He was not in a mood for them.

Harry mounted his broom and kicked off the ground, soaring up into the air. This woke him up far quicker than Oliver's new theories. It felt wonderful to be back onto the Quidditch field. He soared around the stadium racing with Fred and George.

"What's that clicking noise?" – Fred called as he was passing.

Harry looked down at the stands where he noticed on the highest seats Colin and his camera, raised for picture after picture, the sound of clicking strangely magnified.

"Harry, look here, look here!" – Colin was shouting.

"Who's that?" – Fred asked.

"No idea!" – Harry lied, putting some speed that got him far from Colin.

"What's going on?" – Oliver shouted, as he came by. "Why's that first year taking pictures? I don't like it. He could be a spy for Slytherin."

"He's a Gryffindor." – Harry said irritably.

"Besides, Oliver," – George interjected. "Slytherins don't need a spy."

"Why not?" – Oliver turned to him.

"Well, that would be because they are here in person." – Fred answered pointing to the ground where several people in green robes were walking.

"I don't believe it." – Oliver hissed. "I booked the field for today."

Oliver shot toward the ground, landing rather harder than he intended. Harry, Fred and George followed.

"Flint!" – Oliver shouted, pointing furiously at him. "This is our practice time! We got up specially! You can clear off now!"

"Relax, Wood." – Flint said with a trollish smile. He was bigger than Oliver. "There's plenty of room for all of us."

"But I booked the field!" – Oliver said, positively spitting rage. "I booked it!"

Gryffindor Chasers joined behind Oliver as Slytherin had no girls in the team.

"But I've got a special note from Professor Snape." – Flint said oily. "I, Professor Snape, give the Slytherin team permission to practice today on the Quidditch field owing the need to train their new Seeker."

"You have a new Seeker?" – Oliver asked distracted. "Who?"

And from behind the six large team members before them came a seventh – Malfoy with his usual sneer and smirk.

"Aren't Lucius Malfoy's son?" – George asked.

"I'm." – Draco sneered.

"And speaking of Draco's father, look what gift he has made to our team." – Flint said.

Malfoy moved forward his broomstick. It was highly polished with a new handle and a set of fine gold letters spelling – Nimbus 2001.

"Very latest model...I believe it outstrips the old 2000 series by a considerable amount. As for the old Cleansweepers," – Flint smiled nastily at Fred and George's Cleansweep Fives, "you can only sweep the floor."

The Gryffindor team was speechless. Malfoy's sneer was so broad that his cold eyes were reduced to slits.

"Oh, look, field invasion." – Flint barked.

Ron and Hermione were crossing the grass to see what this commotion was. Harry looked back and saw his sisters coming along too.

"What's going on?" – Ron asked. "Why aren't you playing? What's he doing here?"

"I'm the new Seeker of Slytherin." – Malfoy said with a smirk. "We were just admiring the new brooms my father bought the team."

Ron gaped at the brooms. Malfoy's smirk grew wider.

"Good, aren't they? But perhaps the Gryffindor team will raise some gold for new ones as you can raffle these Cleansweep Fives; I believe a museum might be interested."

The Slytherins roared with laughter.

"At least no one on Gryffindor had to buy in their place." – Hermione cut them off. "They got in pure talent."

The mug look on Malfoy's face flickered.

"No one asked your opinion, Mudblood." – He spat.

Harry noticed Draco had said something bad as his team reacted quite angrily. Flint had to move in and save Malfoy from the angered Fred and George while Alicia shrieked, "How dare you!" But Flint was too late as a magenta jet of light hit Malfoy straight into the stomach and he flew few yards before he fell on the grass. Everyone looked around and saw Cassie holding high her wand.

Flint ran to Malfoy. "Are you alright, Draco?"

Draco did not reply but the next second he opened his mouth several slugs dribbled off onto the ground.

"What did you do?" – Flint bellowed at Cassie.

"He'll enjoy it for the next several days." – Cassie replied angrily, her eyes dangerously flickering. "He went too far."

"I agree." – Xsi said raising her wand too and pointing it at Flint. "Now scam."

"Or we will help you." – Cassie added.

Flint's wand however did fly out and he was about to hex her. At this moment, Colin was clicking like crazy with his camera but fell stricken by a spell. Everyone turned to the source and the source happened to be no other than Harry. Colin's obsessive clicking had crossed the line and Harry had finally lost control.

Flint was about to congratulate him but Harry stroke him as well. Harry's eyes had regained their dangerous flashing and the other members of the Slytherin team had no desire to test Harry's temper. They took Flint and Malfoy and left the field quickly.

Harry, on the other hand, climbed back on his broom and took off without a second thought. His heart was pounding. He had to get away from people and regain the control he had before. He could not allow himself to be consumed by these kind of feelings again.

In the meantime, Cassie, Xsi, Ron and Hermione headed to Hagrid's. They had called after Harry but he did not appear to have heard them.

They were within twenty feet of Hagrid's hut when they saw the front door opening. They saw Lockhart, wearing pale mauve robes, and still speaking to Hagrid.

"Quick, behind here." – Cassie hissed quickly.

"It's a simple matter if you know what you're doing." – Lockhart was saying. "If you need help you know where to find me. I'm surprised you haven't read my books, yet. Well, good-bye."

They waited until Lockhart's out of view then came out and then knocked on the door. Hagrid appeared at once looking very angry but his expression softened when he saw who it was

"Ah, it's you." – He said cheerfully. "I was afraid Lockhart's back again."

They went in. Cassie sat on the fluffy chair occupied by Fang, Hagrid's dog and scratched him between the ears.

"So what's goin' on with you?" – Hagrid asked as he closed the door.

"Well, you wouldn't believe it anyway." – Ron said sitting on a chair.

"What?"

"Well, Malfoy..." – Ron grinned with his teeth. "He called Hermione a Mudblood."

"No, he didn't?" – Hagrid looked outraged.

"He did and Cassie, here, cursed him." – Ron continued.

"Anyway, I don't know why everyone went so mad." – Hermione said. "What's a Mudblood?"

"A Mudblood, Hermione, is the greatest insult you can say to a person." – Ron answered. "Mudblood is really a foul name for someone who's a muggle-born – you know with no magical parents."

"Oh!" – Hermione exclaimed.

"There are some magical families like Malfoy's who think they're better than the rest because they are pure blood." – Ron continued. "I mean it doesn't really matter. Look at Neville, he's a pure blood and he can hardly stand a cauldron the right way up."

"An' they haven't invented a spell our Hermione can' do," – Hagrid added proudly, making Hermione go a brilliant shade of magenta.

"It's disgusting thing to call someone." – Ron said. "Dirty blood – nonsense. Most wizard families are half-blood anyway. If we hadn't married muggles we'd've died out."

"Well, I don' blame you for cursin' him." – Hagrid said. "Although, young Cassie, you will be in trouble as I 'spect Lucius Malfoy will come marchin' up ter school for cursin' his son."

"Well, let him come." – Cassie said. "But this was not the only thing that happened."

"There's more?" – Hagrid raised eyebrows.

"Yeah," – Xsi continued. "Flint was about to hex Cassie and..."

"Colin Creevey was hovering around madly clicking with his camera when he got hit and then Flint was hit." – Ron explained.

"Hit? By whom?"

"Harry." – Hermione gave the stunning answer.

"Wha?" – Hagrid exclaimed god-smacked.

"Harry attacked Colin and then Flint who was probably about to congratulate him." – Cassie confirmed.

"Harry?" – Hagrid continued to stare unbelievably.

"Yeah," – Xsi nodded. "And then he flew away. Oliver took Colin to the infirmary."

"Yeah, I'm not sure what he's going to tell Professor McGonagall." – Cassie shared.

"Yeah, these past few days, Harry have not been acting himself." – Xsi said. "It is like talking to a stranger."

"If it actually involved talking, Sis," – Cassie corrected her. "It's more like talking to a wall."

"You should have heard him the first day." – Ron jumped in. "He told Lockhart..." And Ron recounted Harry's speech.

"Wow!" – Cassie exclaimed visibly impressed. "He's gone totally overboard."

"Oh, it doesn't stop there." – Hermione added. "He missed McGonagall's class too. After that I checked the score points and Gryffindor was with fifty points less and he lost ten more in class but around dinner time the points were restored."

"How's that possible? What happened?"

"We couldn't figure it out." – Ron shrugged.

Near lunch time, the gang left Hagrid to get something to eat since they had barely eaten. They bid Hagrid good-bye and headed to the castle. As they marched in the cool entrance Professors McGonagall and Snape appeared looking very distressed.

"Here we go." –Xsi said.

"Yeah, the concert is beginning." – Cassie sighed.

"Miss Solmyr!" – Snape's voice rang out with notion of anger. "You'll come with me in my office."

"Actually in mine, Professor Snape," – McGonagall interrupted.

"Very well," – Snape said bitterly.

"Where is Mr. Potter?" – McGonagall asked.

"He flew away." – Cassie replied.

"What? Where is he now?"

"We don't know."

"Professor Snape, be so kind to locate Mr. Potter!" – McGonagall said. "Miss Solmyr, follow me."

"Wish me luck." – Cassie smiled.

"Good lick." – Ron said while Hermione let a smile but corrected him. "Good luck, I believe you wanted to say." – Ron realized that. "Yeah, good luck."

Cassie and McGonagall walked away while Snape darted off to look for Harry. Ron, Hermione and Xsi proceeded to the Great Hall.

Saturday afternoon melted away in no time and dinner time came along but there was still no sign of Harry. Ron and Hermione noticed that fact. The teacher's table was void of Professors Snape, Dumbledore and McGonagall.

"Do you think Harry's alright?" – Hermione asked sounding concerned.

"I hope so." – Ron said trying to reassure her.

Harry, after having flown away, landed on other side of the castle. He could hardly control his emotions. Flying was not helping much. His thoughts were becoming dark and filled with anger. The delicate balance he had built over a week was broken.

But the truth was that every day was a struggle. Some undefined nagging feeling was keeping him up every night accompanied by the frightening tingling sensation and then followed by the inexplicable anger that was burning through his blood but he had managed somehow to contain everything. But now, now, everything has gone through the window swept by a powerful wind.

The tingling returned again as though by command but it was not with the usual strength. It was like he was barely registering it on the back of his senses.

"Enough is enough!" – Harry said aloud. He was tired of this. It was time he put an end to it and everything else but he needed help and an idea came to him, a terrible idea. His eyes narrowed. He stood up reaffirming his cool he called into the air.

"Casper, Kaiser!"

Two loud cracks were heard and the two house elves appeared.

"Master Nimbus called." – Both bowed to the ground.

"Go and find my cloak and bring it to me, Casper!" – He commanded and Casper vanished.



Kaiser was looking a bit bewildered at his master. There was some drastic change in his behavior, which was totally unusual.

"Kaiser, I have a task for you." – Harry continued. "I want you to go home and pick Thant's book of advanced Offensive and Defensive spells and bring it to me."

Kaiser this time looked completely terrified at the very thought of Harry's order.

"You are not to tell Thant or Saptienna or anyone else or divulge in any other indirect way and should you do 'Let the all the might of Mortis strike you down' – Mortis Selentia Amir." – Harry had seen the vowing spell once. He never thought he would be using it on any creature let alone the faithful Kaiser but he had to make sure he will obey him without question.

The little terrified creature was surrounded by a shimmering grey cloud then he bowed to the ground. Kaiser then vanished and reappeared ten seconds later holding the book in question in his shaking hands.

Harry nodded approvingly and whispered. "Gallea medea absolu." A silver cloud surrounded Kaiser and the terror in the eyes of the elf subdued.

Casper appeared then with Harry's cloak.

"Thank you, Casper." – Harry said. "I want both you at my disposal twenty four seven. I want you to remain in Hogwarts. You are not to answer any calling from any of the Solmyrs or anyone else for whatever reason. Is this understood?"

"Perfectly, Master Nimbus," – Kaiser squeaked.

"Yes, Master Nimbus." – Casper bowed too to the ground.

"Good, then you can go and have a snack or something." – Harry said more softly.

The two elves vanished on the spot. Harry pulled the cloak over him and proceeded away from the castle. He headed back to the forest

where last year he had encountered the hooded figures. This would be the last place anyone or anything would go looking for him.

He reached it in under an hour. There he sat and opened the book. He began reading it without any delay. Usually, it would take him unbelievably long time to concentrate or even imagining casting any of these spells but this time they were coming almost naturally to him. If Harry was thinking straight he would have been completely terrified at this new side of himself. He had crossed more to the very side he despised but darkness can be found in any of us. And the last few days could manage to push anyone overboard.

Harry had not yet the crossed the point of no return for he was still in the grey areas.

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 21

### Blood and Terror

Severus Snape's inability to locate Harry Potter got Professors McGonagall and Dumbledore worried. All three of them began immediate search of the grounds. They searched all day but found nothing. It was like young Harry had vanished. Dumbledore suspected Harry was hiding somewhere with the cloak on and given what he knew of the cloak there was not even a remote chance to locate him unless they possessed a magical eye. Unfortunately, the one that could have helped in the search was on a secret assignment by the Ministry for Magic so they had to give up the search and call it a night hoping that Harry was safe for now.

Dumbledore however went to ask the centaurs to look for the boy in the forest. It was possible Harry could be there. He asked Hagrid too to search for him and Hagrid did – all night with no luck.

The next day, the search continued but with the same sad results. However, the teachers were not the only ones looking for him. The twenty five hooded figures were also seeking the boy. They had noticed that the boy had snuck out as the teachers were searching the grounds for him. The hooded ones had assembled on a glare in the forest. Their leader came last.

"They have still not located the boy." – He said.

"Wizards!" – A hooded one said with disdain.

"The good news is that he is not in the castle however the bad is that he is not in the surroundings either."

"So where the heck is he?" – Another one asked. "Can't we sniff him out?"

"No, he has managed to elude 'the sniffing'. I doubt he's done this on purpose since he doesn't know who we are. But we might need to resort to other tactics. We have to find a way to flush him out." – The leader said.

"Why not use some of his friends as baits?"

"In principle, it is a good idea but his friends are related to the Ministry and we don't want to involve them."

"I have an idea." – Another hooded spoke.

"I'm all ears."

"Terror!"

The leader pushed back slightly his hood revealing his blood red eyes that were quite scary.

"Excellent." – He hissed. "Get to it but proceed cautiously nonetheless. We don't want to attract too much attention."

"Understood." – The group of hooded ones replied in unison and then spread in different directions.

Meanwhile in Black Shire, Thant was in the library on his desk. He was doing some research. He stood up and moved the upper shelves to look for a book but the book was not there. He frowned. 'Where is it', he thought. He looked through all the shelves but found nothing. He frowned more.

"Caper," – He called into the air but the house elf did not appear. "Casper," He repeated louder but still nothing. "Where is this darn elf when you need him?" He said under breath. "Ah, well, Kaiser!" But Kaiser did not show up either. He called for another half an hour both but there was only silence.

Thant frowned this time with concern. It was highly unusual for the elves not to obey their master's call unless something had happened to them. They were so reckless at times.

An hour later however, they still did not show up. Thant was now very concerned.

"Saptienna, dear, have you seen lately Casper or Kaiser?" – He asked as he came into the kitchen.

"No, I haven't. Why?" – She asked.

"I have been calling for over an hour." – Thant replied.

"They could be with the girls." – Saptienna suggested.

"No, even then they would have come." – Thant shook his head.  
"You don't think they could be..."

"Oh, dear!" – Saptienna exclaimed. "Don't go there. There has to be another explanation."

"I hope so." – Thant said. "By the way have you seen anywhere the book of Advanced Off and Def?"

"No, why?"

"I can't find it anywhere."

"Did you look in the attic?"

"I have – everywhere and nothing."

"But where could it be then?"

"I don't know but I do get the feeling the missing might know."

"Oh, they wouldn't dare." – Saptienna said.

"Unless, our two resident mischievers..."

"Oh, dear, I don't think that girls would do such a thing."

"I guess there is only one way to know for sure." – Thant said.

"Wait dear," – Saptienna said. "Princess!"

A loud crack was heard and Princess appeared.

"You called, Mistress." – Princess said.

"Would you please go to Hogwarts and ask Cassie or Xsi if they have made Casper or Kaiser, take the book of Advanced Offensive and Defensive spells for some reason? Tell them that we're not mad we just want to know."

"Of course, Mistress." – Princess answered though the moment she heard Saptienna's request she flinched slightly. This did not go unnoticed by Thant.

"Wait!" – He commanded. "You have seen them take the book haven't you?"

Princess swallowed. "Yes, master."

"Why didn't you say something?"

"I thought you have asked for it, master."

"Then why did you flinch?"

"Kaiser, he...did not look quite himself."

Thant frowned on the spot. "What do you mean – not quite him?"

Princess lowered her eyes. "He appeared terrified, Master."

"Terrified?" – Thant exclaimed shocked.

"Maybe, he was." – Saptienna said. Thant looked at her. "Well, he knows that taking this book would certainly anger you."

"Tell me everything you remember, Princess." – Thant said. He was still not fully convinced. And Princess obeyed but something was still not making much sense.

Saptienna also frowned. Something was definitely not right. "Princess," – She said. "With your permission, I would like Thant to look inside your thoughts and see for himself."

"Of course, mistress."

"Be gentle, dear." – She turned to Thant who nodded.

Thant took his wand and said. "Leglili mens."

He quickly located the memory but what he saw terrified him as well. Kaiser was displaying symptoms of total terror something he would

not associate with the normal dread of simply taking without permission that book.

"Saptienna, you should take a look too." – Thant said gravely. Saptienna took her wand and had a peek. She emerged with a concerned look.

"This is not the usual behavior of Kaiser." – She observed.

"No," – Thant nodded in agreement. "Kaiser is under a spell."

"Under a spell?" – Princess exclaimed involuntarily.

"Yes, Princess, but it is not only just a spell – it is the vowing spell. These are the usual side effects." – Thant said.

"But dear, even if he is under that spell, he would still obey your command." – Saptienna pointed out.

"Unless, he is obeying a Solmyr."

"Cassie and Xsi will never make him or use such a spell." – Saptienna vividly disagreed.

"Well, someone is." – Thant said. "Princess, take me to Hogwarts."

"Yes, Master." – Princess grabbed Thant by the arm, turned on the spot and vanished.

They both appeared in the atrium of Hogwarts. Thant headed straight for Dumbledore's office. But there was no one there. Thant turned to a portrait.

"Master Dipit, where is Professor Dumbledore?"

"Professor Dumbledore is out." – The framed headmaster replied.

"I noticed but where? I need to speak with him."

"He did not tell us where."

"I guess I'll try the teacher's room." – Thant said though more to himself than to the frame.

He left the office and headed to the teacher's room. There he found Professor Sinistra.

"Professor,"

"Can I help you?"

"Yes, my name is Thant Solmyr. I'm looking for Professor Dumbledore."

"Lord Solmyr?" – Sinistra stepped back. "Ah, the headmaster was about to contact you anyway."

"Why?"

"Harry Potter is missing already two days. The rest of the teachers are looking for him."

"WHAT?" – Thant exclaimed visibly shocked.

"Ah, Lord Solmyr," – Someone called. Thant turned and came face to face with McGonagall. "Please, come with me."

"Where is Harry?" – Thant asked.

"We are still looking for him. But there is something I would like to discuss with you in my office."

"Of course."

They reached McGonagall's office where the Professor told him of Harry's recent inexplicable behavior. She also told him of the way Ron and he had arrived to Hogwarts.

"Why haven't you told about this?" – Thant asked.

"I wrote you a letter explaining." – McGonagall said. "But seeing you now it seems you haven't read it."

"No, I haven't." – Thant said. "Probably, my wife omitted this. Did the Pegasus Riders depict any kind of symbol?"



"No, I don't think so, no." – McGonagall shook head.

Thant looked quite grave and very concerned.

"There is also something else." – The professor continued and told him of Cassie's performance and her reasons behind it. Thant managed to smile for a second.

"Thank you, Professor McGonagall. Would be so kind to get Cassie and Xsi here?"

"Of course," – McGonagall said and exited.

Thant remained thoughtful. The news he just learnt were highly disturbing. What has prompted Harry to take off like that was beyond him but he needed all details before jumping to conclusions.

Cassie and Xsi were in the Great Hall when Professor McGonagall came to collect them. Hermione, Alamar and Ron were there too. For some reason, McGonagall decided to take them also. They all arrived before the professor's office but only Cassie and Xsi entered.

"Dad?" – Xsi exclaimed surprised.

"Professor McGonagall, do you mind leaving me alone with my daughters?" – Thant asked.

"Not at all," – McGonagall replied. "Miss Granger, Misters Weasley and Darkstone are outside as well."

Thant nodded. He understood her hint. "Thank you!" McGonagall left. Thant turned his attention to the girls.

"Would the two of you explain to me what you needed the book of Advanced Offensive and Defensive Spells for? And most importantly why Casper and Kaiser are not responding to my calls?"

The reaction of the girls however displayed sheer surprise and utter shock. There was no mistake. Thant clearly saw it.

"Casper and Kaiser?" – Xsi stuttered as she came out of the shock.

"The book of Advanced Spells? Your book...?" – Cassie stammered.

"But Dad, we would never...we would never ask Casper or Kaiser to do such a thing." – Xsi protested.

"Yeah, we can do it on our own." – Cassie added.

"Then why these two do not obey my command? Have you been using for something at school? For pranks perhaps?"

Cassie and Xsi looked guiltily at each other for the truth was that they have been using them for exactly such a purpose.

"Well?" – Thant looked expectantly.

"Yeah, we have but the pranks are harmless...more or less." – Cassie replied.

"It's nothing serious." – Xsi added.

"But we have never commanded to disobey you or anything." – Cassie explained.

"Yo sis," – Xsi exclaimed suddenly.

"What?"

"You don't think that..."

"No, how could it be?"

"Well, it's been strange."

"So?"

"I don't know. Hermione's been telling him how weird he's been acting."

"Yeah but that's no reason to abandon reason, is it?"

Thant watched silently this little banter exchange. "Ah, excuse me, you haven't forgotten about me?" – He reminded of his presence.

"Ah, sorry, Dad." – Xsi said diplomatically.

"Care to let me in?"

"Ah, it's about Nimbus, Dad." – Xsi replied. "He's been acting a bit odd this week."

"Yeah, ever since he and Ron came to school with that flying car."

"What flying car?" – Thant's eyes jumped out of orbit.

"Well, I guess Ron can explain it better. He's been with Nimbus all that time."

"Well, get him in then." – Thant concluded.

Xsi exited and then returned with Ron and the others. They greeted and Thant asked Ron to recount everything. And Ron started with King Cross, and then the flight. He was telling how they were getting close to the school when these, whoever they were attacked again. This time however Ron was telling the story with all of its details and it sounded far scarier than the abbreviated version and lastly, the near crash into the water, the Pegasus Riders, and then the attack just outside Greenhouse Three.

At this point, it made everyone in the room shiver. Hermione, Cassie, Xsi and Alamar could not believe their ears.

"Why didn't you say something?" – Alamar exclaimed.

"How could you keep this from us?" – Xsi asked shocked.

"You should have told a teacher about it! Ron, how could you?" – Hermione exclaimed outraged.

"Harry did not want to throw anyone in panic." – Ron defended himself.

"Into panic, are you kidding?" – Xsi ranted.

"Enough!" – Thant's thunderous voice put an end to the bickering.

Silence befell the office. Thant looked extremely concerned. He now had a pretty good idea of how grave things were. Something sinister

was going on around here. Something was not adding up. Ron's story depicted these hooded figures but sadly they did not sound like the lackeys of a dark wizard. And it was plainly clear that they were after Harry. Ron was simply at the wrong place, at the wrong time but then again Ron's actions in the car have saved Harry's life.

The strangest thing in the story was the Pegasus Riders. The Riders would not have come out to help an ordinary wizard unless they were summoned or picked up on dark threads. And speaking of such, Thant remembered last year's ordeal and frowned even more. This was making no sense to him.

The question now was what has prompted Harry to act so defensively. Ron indicated that he was having slight sensations acting like an early warning system. But this would be true only if he had increased natural ability or the necromancer's senses. However, Harry was not a necromancer by birth so his senses should not be that heightened. But given what Thant just heard it seemed like Harry had gone overboard. The behavioral change Hermione spoke of was totally unlike Harry. It could have been more appropriate for a boy of fourteen or sixteen but not that of twelve or even a Slytherin but not him.

There was something more Thant was sensing – Kaiser. The elf's behavior seemed to be connected to Harry's. It occurred to him that Harry could have commanded the two elves not obey anyone but Harry. But the question remained – why?

Whatever the situation was Thant knew only this he had to find Harry and inform Dumbledore of the new threat in the castle's surroundings. If these figures have managed to penetrate Hogwarts' defenses then all students were in danger.

"Come, we have to find Professor Dumbledore." – Thant said after a while and they all exited McGonagall's office.

While the hooded ones and the teachers were searching the grounds and the castle for Harry, Harry was flying on his broom slightly above the castle itself. No one has been able to see him for he was under the cloak. With one hand he was controlling his broom and with the other he was holding the book of spells. He figured that during the day he has to be in orbit of the castle and at night he could land back in the Forbidden Forest to rest and continue his

training. Kaiser and Casper were coming from time to time to bring him food and drinks.

Harry was thinking of the features about cops on a stakeout for he was doing something similar. His reading has helped in solving part of the mystery of the hooded ones. He found out that wizards have not been using the chasing 'net' and that particular 'brick wall' spells for over two centuries, actually since 1680. This was five years before the Ministry for Magic was created. The books he found in the library suggested of a monumental event that united all the wizards on the British Isle and thus they created this official body to govern them. Unfortunately, there was no information onto what this event was but it did suggest a possible battle between good and evil, wizards and other magical races though nothing in details just a reference.

Day and night, Harry continued his training but he had nowhere to practice for he did not want to attract attention. The tingling sensation had subdued and for a time had gone completely. He was thinking about returning to the castle despite what consequences he was to face but his gut feeling was against it.

And then one day just before nightfall Harry was flying near the West Tower when he almost fell off the broom. He heard a voice. But this voice was chill to bone narrow, a voice of breathtaking, ice-cold venom.

"Come...come to me...Let me rip you...Let me tear you...Let me kill you..."

The voice dissipated soon after but it left chills and jeepers out of Harry. He had never heard such coldness emanate from anyone or anything but then again he was not familiar with every surprise lurking in the wizard world.

Harry was wondering whether to go down and warn someone but his usual problem returned as well. This time however he did see the source – hooded figures. They had surrounded the castle and a few more headed back to the forest.

This time Harry was determined to find out who they were so he followed those but shortly after he lost them as though they had sunken into the ground. He returned to the castle only to find all the

hooded ones gone too. Harry shook head – did he imagine them just a few minutes ago – no, he clearly saw them. But then where were they?

Nightfall came and Harry returned to his usual spot in the dark forest. He slept under the cloak, perched on a branch just in case. The cloak could hide him but it did not prevent anyone from walking into him, he was not a ghost. Of course, sleeping on a branch was not even remotely close to sleeping in his comfortable bed in Gryffindor Tower but after some time one kind of gets used to it.

He slept until late morning. Casper appeared with breakfast. Harry jumped down to eat thanking the faithful elf.

"Master Nimbus," – Casper said.

"Yes, Casper?" – Harry looked at him.

"Master Thant is here. They are all looking for you."

Harry swallowed. 'Thant was here.' He must have noticed his book missing and the fact that the elves were no longer obeying his calls or the girls'. Harry swallowed hard again. Maybe he could have asked Thant about this lurking threat but it was possible Thant knew nothing about it. 'No', the voice in Harry's head said. He will find the answer out on his own. He did not want to involve anyone into this. But then they were all looking for him. He had got them all worried. What to do?

"Casper," – Harry said finally decided. "Take this note to Alamar." Harry quickly wrote it down and gave it to Casper. "Tell him I'll wait for him at the Astronomy tower at midnight."

Casper bowed and vanished. Harry stayed still for a moment wondering what he was going to tell his friend. He was wondering with all the pressure would his friend come without all the school staff behind him – bah, he was going to come. Alamar enjoyed an adventure even behind everyone's backs.

Midnight came. Harry was already in place waiting for his friend and Alamar did not disappoint. However, Alamar could not find Harry for he was still under the cloak. Harry was waiting another minute or two just to be sure.

"Harry, are you here?" – Alamar whispered. "Harry?"

"Boo." – Harry had moved behind Alamar. At the sound of Harry's voice Alamar jumped off. "Gees, Harry."

"Sorry, Alamar," – Harry laughed. "Had to make sure we were alone."

"Sure, by scaring the jeepers out of me." – Alamar said.

"Yeah, well, come on! Climb on."

"On what?"

"The broom of course, we can't stay here." – Harry said revealing himself from the under the cloak.

"Oh, so this is how you did it?" – Alamar exclaimed.

"Come on!" – Harry urged.

Alamar climbed behind him while Harry covered them both with the cloak and took off. He headed back to the forest but to another spot. He trusted Alamar but Dumbledore and Thant had their ways of learning things without anyone telling them anything so he did not want to risk his true hideout.

"Here, we are." – Harry said as he landed and de-cloaked them.

"Harry, what's going on?" – Alamar said as he dismounted the broom.

"I wish I knew,"

"Everyone's worried sick, not to mention Thant."

"I know."

"Well?"

"Well, someone is chasing me."

"Who?"

"Did I not say someone?"

"The teachers can guard us. They have done so for centuries in this school." – Alamar argued.

"Yeah, like when they let Voldemort in Quirrell last year roam free in Hogwarts or those that attacked me in the forest, yeah right – great protection – no doubt." – Harry countered.

"And what you think you can do better?"

"Have someone found me so far?"

"Ha, very funny!" – Alamar exclaimed. "Sooner or later they are going to find you."

"Wait!"- Harry said. "Yesterday, I almost fell off the broom and..."

"Oh, that's very commendable..."

"Would you let me finish?" – Harry interrupted him. "I heard a voice."

"Voice? What voice?"

And Harry told him. Alamar looked at him bemused. "When?" Harry recalled the time.

"Hmm, that's strange." – Alamar remarked. "I don't recall such a thing."

"Maybe, you did not hear it. It would have been quite a coincidence for you to have been there at the same time."

"Well, I was. The West tower belongs to Ravenclaw but I was there nonetheless."

"How?"

"Well," – Alamar stuttered turning red.

"Aha," – Harry smiled.



"Harry, look hearing voices even in the wizard world is not a good sign." – Alamar said.

"Maybe, you did not hear it but someone else might have."

"Well, it is possible." – Alamar agreed. "But you have to come back."

"No, I have to find the identities of those chasing me."

"You can spend the entire duration of the year looking for it." – Alamar said. "Not to mention, you will probably get the longest detention in history."

"Very funny," – Harry said. "Ok, if I don't find anything by the end of the weekend I'll come back."

"You promise?"

"I promise but you must promise you'll tell no one of..."

"I promise. They'll have my head for that probably but I promise."

Harry returned Alamar to Hogwarts and then they parted ways. Harry came back to sleep.

The weekend came quickly. Harry was once again hovering above the castle with the book in hand. The night came and Harry returned to his usual spot.

He had just closed his eyes when his senses kicked in. This time it appears he was not careful enough. He noticed the hooded ones coming from shadows. And then he noticed that he had been so tired he had not put the cloak over him. Instead it was lying near the tree trunk and there was no time to retrieve it or his broom.

This time he had messed it up. He clearly noticed wands. 'So this was it, huh,' Harry thought. Well, it had to be over one way or another. Harry jumped down and took out his wand. The first red beam missed him only by an inch. He saw once again nets forming but before they were complete he obliterated them.

"Surrender young wizard," – A deep hissing voice echoed throughout the glade. "You are surrounded and you're no match for us."

"Us being who?" – Harry wanted to know.

"You will find out soon enough."

"Not soon enough, I want to know now." – Harry bellowed.

Instead of an answer, all hooded ones opened fire. Harry had to duck. The bark of the tree exploded.

It appeared the time for his spell practice had come. Harry raised his wand and concentrated as much as it was possible. "Seriem Sulfuris" But it did not work. Harry ducked again, unfortunately not quickly enough. He was hit in the left shoulder. Hot pain ran through it. He screeched but stood up and the anger that followed for being hit produced the spell he was trying to conjure the first time.

The effect was immediate and unforeseen. All parties on the field were struck by lightening. Harry redressed himself up raising his wand against the one that had spoken and muttered. "Tonitros Vectis"

A lightening bolt struck and shot the target backwards with thundering strength. Another jet however grazed Harry and he flinched with pain. He turned to the source, "Radius Ignis." A blood red jet flew off Harry's wand. The target ducked but the spell hit him anyway.

Harry used the distraction to mount his broom, take his cloak and shot off to the skies. But his getaway lasted mere seconds. Several jets pierced the sky hitting him – one touched his shoulder, another straight at his back and the other in his hip. Harry lost his balance and fell from five meters straight into a tree. He heard something crack and a second later realized it was his left arm.

The hooded ones found him quickly. Harry reacted instinctively directing his wand. "Ignis globus" A ball of fire jumped off his wand forcing his pursuers to find cover. Another jet hit and something hot covered his shirt. Harry touched the place and his hand was covered in his own blood.

The pursuers continued to fire and inflicted more wounds on Harry though he was fighting back. In the next few minutes however, they made the mistake of being gathered together. Harry's efforts were coming to an end. His vision had become blurry but he did notice their mistake. He mastered whatever strength he had left and bellowed. "Vortex Anima." The sheer strength of this last effort produced a whirlwind that shot his pursuers high and far in the heavens. Then Harry felt himself slip and fall onto the ground. He tried to push himself up but his muscles did not hold. His vision became blurrier and he lost consciousness.

"Nimbus! Nimbus!" – Thant was calling as one can imagine that the battle in the glade had not gone unnoticed.

Thant reached the glade. At one end, even through the trees, he saw Harry's cloak and the book but no Harry. He hurried there and slipped onto something lost balance and kissed the ground hard. Redressing himself up, he realized the something was blood. He followed the trail. Near a massive tree just ten meters ahead, he saw a foot. He increased his pace, reached the tree and looked behind it where he froze on the spot terrified.

The sight was not pretty. In a pool of dark blood laid Harry. He had so many wounds on him one can easily confuse him with Swiss cheese. He knelt down, touched Harry's neck hoping it has not come to the worst. He sensed a very faint pulse, relaxing slightly, he took out his wand and started applying healing spells on his wounds to stop the bleeding.

Most of the wounds closed but unfortunately some remained open. Thant had recognized some of the spells used on him. They were of a dark nature and could be healed but it would take time. He placed as much counters as he knew of to protect Harry from the side effects of some of the spells that spread evil effects. Harry needed immediately to be moved and placed under healer's care.

Thant shot a spell into the air and soon the very worried Dumbledore appeared. Seeing Harry, the headmaster also froze.

"We need to move him quickly." – Thant urged. "But carefully nonetheless, he's very weak and fragile."

"Of course," – Albus nodded.

Both managed to lift Harry and carry him to the castle as gently as possible. Madam Pomfrey hurried to help them put him on a bed.

"What has happened?" – She asked.

"He's gravely wounded, Pomona." – Albus explained.

"We need to contact St. Mungo's. They have to send a healer here for moving him there is out of the question." – Thant said.

"I agree." – Albus said.

"I'll get right to it, headmaster." – Pomona said.

"Professor Dumbledore, we need to talk." – Thant said as they exited the hospital wing.

"In my office," – Albus led the way.

When they entered, Albus turned to Thant.

"Headmaster," – Thant began but stopped at once. He looked at Dumbledore then at the portraits.

"Dear colleagues, would you please excuse us." – Albus said to the portraits that weren't very happy but obeyed. "Now, we are alone."

Thant recounted the events as he had learnt them. "Something had prompted Harry to act defensively and completely unlike his usual self. These hooded figures unfortunately do not strike me as the usual lackeys of a dark wizard."

"So much, I agree with." – Albus nodded.

"They could be something sin..." – Thant's voice trailed off. He wasn't sure how to proceed. He had no desire of revealing to Dumbledore who he really is. There was also another problem. His thoughts were dwelling in the general area of the Necromancers' oldest enemies and that was not a very comforting thought. Unfortunately, the wizards knew almost nothing of their existence.

Well, they did know about few of them but they were harmless in comparison to the others.

Albus was about to ask about it but a headmaster in the uniform of Slytherin returned to his frame.

"Dumbledore, Professor McGonagall wants to see you at once."

"Thank you!" – Albus said frowning. Both proceeded out the office.

While Thant and Dumbledore were getting to Harry, Hermione and Ron, after dinner, had been heading to Gryffindor tower by an alternate route. They were on the second floor near the girl's bathroom.

"Oh, no, let's not pass by here." – Hermione said as she saw where they were.

"Why?" – Ron asked intrigued.

"This is the bathroom where Myrtle hangs." – Hermione replied.

"Oh," – Ron exclaimed. "Ok."

They turned around the corner and both froze. They had heard something banging against the window from the outside. They looked at each other. Fear had crawled in their eyes. The banging continued but they dared not open the window. It was quite creepy.

"Maybe," – Ron whispered. "It's a tree branch."

"Yeah, a tree branch," – Hermione agreed trying to calm herself down.

"We should get going." – Ron suggested with growing confidence.

"Yeah," – Hermione nodded.

They just made a few paces when Ron slipped and fell to the ground. He got up swearing.

"Where is this water coming from?" – He continued cursing.

"Myrtle's bathroom." – Hermione replied. "She has probably flooded the bathroom."

"Crazy ghost!" – Ron observed angrily still assessing the damage from the fall.

"Well, she does have her tantrums but this is pushing it." – Hermione noticed.

"As I said, crazy ghost." – Ron said.

They were to leave the floor when they both heard a chant that was all too familiar.

"Peeves!" – Ron exclaimed. "It would be best to avoid him."

"I agree but then we'll have to go back and find another way." – Hermione pointed out.

"We have little choice unless you want an encounter with another nut case."

They turned back although they would have wished they had continued and faced Peeves anyways. It would have spared them a lot.

Reaching the bathroom, however, their stomachs lurched at the sight. Down the passage something was gleaming at the wall. Foot-high words had been daubed on the wall between two windows. The words, as they saw, were written in something that resembled blood and were saying, 'The Chamber of Secret has been opened. Enemies of the Heir, beware.'

"What's that thing hanging underneath?" – Ron said a slight quiver in his voice.

They edged near it but jumped backwards at once as they saw what it was – Mrs. Norris. The caretaker's cat was hanging by her tail, stiff as a board, her eyes wide and staring. For some seconds, they did not move.

"We really need to get out of here." – Ron said.

The wind outside however had increased speed and pushed open one of the windows nearby. Hermione turned in the direction of the window and the scream that should have ensued was stuck in her throat. The sight outside paralyzed her completely.

"Let's go!" – Ron urged but Hermione did not budge even one millimeter. "What's wrong?"

Hermione was unable to answer as she was, per say, just as petrified as the hanging upside down caretaker's cat. Ron turned around and came face to face with the sight out the window becoming as frozen as Hermione.

Outside, perched on a tree branch upside down was a small corpse. It looked like a small girl, a first year. Her eyes were lifeless, blank. Her face was covered in blood.

Hermione managed to avert her eyes, leaning onto Ron who patted her clumsily.

The floor was suddenly filled with the happy voices of students coming from the Great Hall but everyone stopped as soon as they saw Mrs. Norris hanging by her tail, and silence fell. Ron, Hermione and Harry stood alone in the middle of the corridor covering instinctively the window.

Then someone shouted. "Enemies of the Heir, beware. You're next, Mudbloods."

It was Draco Malfoy. He had pushed to the front of the crowd, his cold eyes alive, as he grinned at the sight of the immobile cat.

"What' that noise? What's going on?" – Filch shouted attracted no doubt by Malfoy's shout. But then he froze as he saw Mrs. Norris falling backwards, clutching his face in horror.

"My Cat, Mrs. Norris, what happened to you?" – He shrieked his eyes threatening to jump off their usual place. "You did this..." He pointed fingers at Ron and Hermione. He appeared completely mad.

"What is this commotion?" – Professor McGonagall asked as she made her way through the crowd. She froze in her steps as she

noticed the hanging upside down cat. Her look then fell at the writing on the wall.

Snape appeared shortly after pushing students aside. His eyes narrowed at the sight too. Filch was drooling mad and pointing helpless fingers at Ron and Hermione. He quickly assessed the situation.

"Severus!" – McGonagall called. "Stay here. I'll go to fetch Professor Dumbledore." Then she turned to the huddled masses and said. "Alright, go back to your dormitories. Come on, go on! Prefects, take them away."

"You killed my cat." – Filch screeched.

Ron would usually respond but he was too petrified but the sight outside that no one has noticed yet. Professor Dumbledore came shortly after alongside McGonagall and Thant.

"Oh," – He exclaimed and headed to the cat. He detached her. "Follow me!" – He said to Filch, "You too, Mr. Weasley, Miss Granger."

"We can't." – Ron managed to squeeze the words somehow.

Dumbledore stopped and looked bemusedly at him. "What? Why not?"

"Professor,..." – Hermione tried to explain but her voice was trembling, her heart racing.

"Yes, Miss Granger?" – Dumbledore looked expectedly at her.

"Professor," – Ron mastered his courage as much as he could. "I think you should...you should..." But he couldn't say it too.

Thant, fortunately, uncovered the reason pretty quickly. His eyes had found the reason and his eyes narrowed at the sight. He took out his wand at once and took defensive stand.

"Dumbledore," – He called. "Come closer." He gestured him to approach the window.



Dumbledore approached and jumped off his feet but regained his composure quickly.

"Severus," – Albus called. Snape reached his position and quickly understood. "Help me get her off."

Both of them, with their wands, brought the girl off the tree. Some teachers came hurriedly just at the time Snape and Dumbledore were getting the girl in.

"Oh, my God," – Professor Sprout exclaimed sobbing.

"Let's take her to the nearest office." – Dumbledore said. "And send for Madam Pomfrey."

"My office is the nearest, headmaster." – Lockhart proposed looking all too important. "Just upstairs – feel free."

"Thank you, Gilderoy."

All proceeded there except Thant. He was still standing in defensive position. As he calmed down, he quickly put the pieces together and understood Harry's behavior. Everything now made perfect sense though he still had to determine which clan they represented.

Thant did not follow the teachers. He had no time for trivial talk. He ventured outside, raised his wand and conjured his patronus, adding – "Send trackers and hunters to Hogwarts at once!"

The teachers entered Lockhart's darkened office and saw for a second portraits dodging off sight with rollers in their hair. The real Lockhart lit the candles on his desk. Dumbledore and Snape lay the girl's body on the polished surface. The sight was pretty ugly. Snape cleaned the blood as much as he could. As it cleaned they noticed the neck was torn possibly by claws but to what animal they belonged Ron and Hermione had no idea. Hermione, actually, turned her face away. She couldn't watch.

Professor Dumbledore started examining the body. It was clear he was quite tense and really concerned.

"She was killed though I can't determine by what." – Dumbledore said. "We'll wait for Madam Pomfrey. In the meantime, Gilderoy put Mrs. Norris over there."

They laid the Filch's cat on a desk where Lockhart placed immediately some candles. Dumbledore's long, crooked nose was just a few inches off Mrs. Norris's fur. He was looking at her closely, running his fingers gently on her while poking and prodding.

Professor McGonagall came shortly after along with Madam Pomfrey. Dumbledore turned to her.

"Pomona, dear, examine the girl."

Madam Pomfrey looked at girl with a mixture of sadness and compassion. She started examining her. She ran her wand around her muttering some words while Dumbledore continued his examination of the cat.

"It is obvious the cat's killed by the Transmogrification Curse. Tut, a bad curse, too bad I wasn't there, I knew the exact counter-curse that would have saved her..."

Lockhart's comments were punctuated by Filch's dry, rocking sobs. He was slumped in a chair near the desk unable to look at Mrs. Norris. Dumbledore was muttering strange words while tapping Mrs. Norris with his wand but nothing happened. Lockhart, of course, was continuing to babble while his portraits were nodding in rhythm.

At last Dumbledore straightened up.

"She's not dead, Argus." – He said softly.

Lockhart stopped abruptly in the middle of his numerous ways of murders he had prevented. Argus Filch looked up with hope.

"She's not? But why is she so all stiff and frozen?"

"She has been petrified." – Dumbledore said. "But how I do not know..."

"Ask them, they know." – Argus suddenly turned around pointing at Ron and Hermione. "They did it..."

"Argus, no second year student can do this." – Dumbledore argued.  
"It would take advance Dark Magic to do this..."

"They did it" – Flitch spat. "You saw what they wrote on the wall..."

"Give it a rest, Flitch." – Snape intervened. Ron and Hermione looked at each other apprehensively. It was not in Snape's usual stance to be so charitable. "Mr. Weasley and Ms Granger might have been simply at the wrong, at the wrong time."

Ron and Hermione became definitely apprehensive though it was still hard to believe.

"But the circumstances are suspicious." – He continued, which the gang understood was his initial intention. "Why were they upstairs in the corridor at all?"

"Well, we..." – Ron trailed off.

"We – what?"

"We were returning to Gryffindor Tower," – Hermione took the word.  
"Using a different route when we noticed large quantities of water..."

"Yes, they were coming from the girl's bathroom," – Ron joined in.  
"Where Moaning Myrtle presides and wanted to leave the floor as quickly as possible but..."

"We were about to run into Peeves so we turned back." – Hermione continued. "When we reached the bathroom again, we saw Mrs. Norris hanging. We were about to leave when..." – Hermione could not continue.

"When – what?" – Snape insisted.

"Well," – Ron mastered as much as he could his voice. "I told Hermione that we should not dwell there but go and get help when the wind flung open a window. I wanted to go but Hermione was not budging. She was frozen stiff just as Mrs. Norris so I inquired what was the reason but when I turned around I quickly saw the reason though I wish I didn't." Ron's voice trembled here and completely vanished.

Hermione at this time found the closest bucket and threw up. Recalling again this horrifying moment brought back very visibly the sight and she could not stand it.

Professor McGonagall hurried to Hermione and embraced her so when she turned around her eyes would not fall on the girl lying on the table. This experience was not pleasant one not to mention that they had not told them yet of Harry.

Professor Dumbledore fixed his gaze on the three as they felt like being scanned with a ray. Then the Professor turned to Madam Pomfrey.

"Pomona?"

"Professor," – Madam Pomfrey swallowed. "Her blood has been drained."

This statement shocked everyone.

"What?" – Professor McGonagall exclaimed, clutching hands at her heart.

"She was attacked by something I do not know what though. I'll need more time to determine. The attacker has torn her arteries and then drained her blood. She died almost instantly, not more than an hour ago, which will coincide with the time they heard the scream." – Madam Pomfrey finished.

Dumbledore looked alerted and very tense. Something was bothering him a lot. The girl was a first year – Slytherin girl coming from a good, pure blood family. Her name was Melinda Becklefeast. He had the sad duty of informing her parents though he was not sure what to tell them. He knew of some animals that could do what had happened to her but they had no prove or idea, yet.

"Thank you, Pomona."

"I'll transfer her to the hospital wing and then..."

"Of course," – Dumbledore nodded. "Severus, please help Pomona with the girl."

"As you wish, Headmaster." – Snape said. "What about Granger and Weasley?"

"I do not believe they did anything this night. They were as you said in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"But my cat has been petrified." – Filch cut in. "I want someone to be punished..."

"Argus, we will be able to revive Mrs. Norris. I understand Madam Sprout is having healthy Mandrakes. When they mature we will stew them and make the restoration potion."

"I will make it." – Lockhart said quickly. "I could whip a Mandrake Restorative potion in my sleep."

"Excuse me," – Snape said icily. "But I believe I'm the Potions master at this school."

There was an awkward pause.

"Minerva, take Ms Granger and Mr. Weasley back to Gryffindor tower," – Albus said then turned to Ron. "Do not breathe a word as to what has happened to Ms. Beicklefeast to anyone."

"Yes, Professor." – Ron said following Hermione and Professor McGonagall out.

Minerva returned them to Gryffindor Tower then went back to Gilderoy's office. Pomona had already moved away the girl and was just returning to take Mrs. Norris. Dumbledore was just exiting the office as Snape returned with a brisk walk.

"Professor Dumbledore, we have intruders on the grounds." – Snape reported.

"What?" – Dumbledore exclaimed visibly shocked.

"I saw at least fifteen unknowns. They had gathered just outside the forest." – Snape continued.

"Severus, gather all the teachers," – Albus ordered. "Minerva, send a message for help to the Ministry Auror's office."

"Of course," – Minerva said and hurried out.

Severus returned with the rest of the teachers and they proceeded to the grounds.

Snape was right there outsiders near the forest. They numbered fifteen. They were spread out along the forest line but as Dumbledore noticed with great surprise there were also house elves between them.

"Headmaster, look." – Snape pointed to the sky.

Dumbledore looked up and his jaw fell. There were winged horses with riders on them hovering above the forest. The riders seemed somewhat familiar and when he caught a glimpse of gold he understood that they were the Pegasus Riders. How had they managed to enter the premises of Hogwarts however was beyond him.

All teachers were hit by a sudden wave of fear and terror. And at this very moment, all fifteen unknowns took out their wands. Before the teachers understood what was going on, the entire line of the forest exploded in jets of light signifying that a battle has begun.

To be continued...

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven

## Chapter 22

### Dark Forces

Few days before Harry got to fight for his life, the hooded ones had left the premises of Hogwarts as they were called by their master. He was not pleased with the lack of progress and now that they had let the boy slip through their nets he was even less pleased.

"Lord Cornelius." – The leader of the hooded ones said bowing to the ground.

Cornelius did not look at him at first. He was preoccupied with dinner that happened to be an unfortunate young boy that simply had been really in the wrong place at the wrong time this evening.

"Alverio," – Cornelius said standing up while tossing the carcass of the young boy aside like a flapping doll. "My orders were very simple – bring me Nimbus Solmyr, alive and unspoiled. But every time, you return without the boy."

"Well, it is not as easy as commanded, milord." – Alverio gulped but continued confidently. "He's well guarded and you ordered us to keep a low profile."

"This is very true." – Cornelius agreed. "But I don't see any result either. I don't have to mention the recent events, do I?"

"No," – Alverio swallowed as Cornelius' voice was becoming dangerously calm.

"That boy had managed somehow to escape outside of the castle where the teachers can no longer protect him and you and the rest of this merry band of idiots can't locate him? Is this what you are trying to tell me?" – This time Cornelius' voice thundered.

"Sadly, yes, Milord." – Alverio answered. "He's nowhere. It's like he disappeared into thin air. His scent is nowhere to be found."

"The boy is still in the premises of the castle, Alverio. Otherwise my hunters would have sensed him. I have placed them around Hogwarts so there is no way he can go out without being detected.

Now, put your brains back together and find me the boy and don't bother coming back without him."

"Ah, Master Cornelius?"

"What?" – Cornelius turned to the one that had spoken.

"What if we run into the teachers?"

"If you do somehow attract their attention as well or you screw up in another fashion..."

"Understood..."

"Good."

"Milord," – Another one stepped from the shadows of the forest where this talk was taking place.

"Vorkus, you have something to add?" – Cornelius asked without turning around.

"Yes, Milord," – Vorkus replied. "The last time, we encountered the boy he resisted. I seriously doubt this time will be any different unless Alverio manages to sneak upon the boy unawares but I doubt that too. He has become sensitive of our presence."

"Vorkus, the boy is not a Necromancer." – Cornelius said.

"No, Milord, he is not but he is sensitive nonetheless. He managed to elude the chasers on the station simply because he sensed their presence." – Vorkus pointed out. "Apparently, we have underestimated his senses' range. He will not go easily."

Cornelius turned around facing Vorkus who withstood his master's gaze. Unfortunately, he had to agree. He has underestimated the boy.

"Easy or not, I want the boy – alive. Am I clear on this one?" – Cornelius demanded.

"Yes, Milord." – Alverio replied.



"Should you encounter any unforeseen circumstances," – Vorkus said. "You will call me, understood?"

"Yes, Count Vorkus." – Alverio replied bowing.

"Now, go and get him." – Vorkus said. "This boy is smart. He will choose places to hide that are unlikely anyone to think of."

"Such as?" – Cornelius asked intrigued.

"We attacked him last year on a glade in the forest. It is possible he might choose that place to rest."

"Why?"

"Well, Milord, it is unlikely we would think he would choose that place to hide. Always do what your opponents will never consider." – Vorkus explained.

"This is not a bad thought, Vorkus." – Cornelius agreed. "Alverio, once you return you will head to that location."

"Yes, Milord." – Alverio nodded.

"But wait until nightfall," – Vorkus cut in. "It is unlikely he would be there during the day."

Alverio bowed, took the others and vanished out of sight. He and his seekers managed once more to sneak through Hogwart's defenses undetected. They headed for the glade Count Vorkus mentioned. It was not difficult to find but there was no sight of the boy though it was certainly clear he had been there before.

Alverio set his people in a wide net around the glade just in case the boy showed up earlier. All of them were using disillusion charms so not to be picked up by the local inhabitants of the forest – mostly centaurs – though he was informed of other creatures with ferocious appetite.

Alverio unfortunately was getting impatient with all the waiting. He commanded his men to stay put while he took a peek at the castle. It was possible the boy had decided to return there. He snuck up hiding in the shadows.

He saw a little redhead carrying some shabby book in her hand. She was walking on the second floor until she entered what seemed to be a bathroom but the door closed so Alverio lost her.

He continued his observation on every floor but they were all empty. The students were still in the Great Hall eating. He noticed also few ghosts and that poltergeist menace Peeves, which he knew perfectly he had to avoid even without anyone telling him. Even in his time all these years ago, that thing was still there and a bloody menace. It's too bad he had no way of finishing it.

He was about to leave for the forest when his senses kicked in. He moved to the third floor where he saw a young first year. She bore the symbols of the Slytherin house. Alverio smiled darkly. He never liked that house. It was filled with the most incompetent people imaginable and the most despicable.

Now after all these years, he could at least taste one. He moved to that floor and from shadow to shadow slipped behind the little one. The girl however stopped. She thought she heard something. But turning around she did not see anything so shrugging she continued walking.

The hunt as they say is the most adrenaline arousing moment. Alverio's kind always projects before their path a wave of fear and terror so the chase may begin and so Alverio did. At one point the girl was struck with those two feelings. She began to run when the doors she was aiming to pass through suddenly closed. All light became extinguished.

It was dark and spooky. The temperature also had gone down but that was because all the windows were opened. The air seemed somehow thicker than before.

The girl took out his wand as Alverio saw which amused quite a lot. She whispered, not stammered – "Lumos". A small light cut through the dark but it was not sufficient as the usual darkness was replaced by the one Alverio projected before him. "Lumos Maxima" – the spell produced the desired effect although she would have wished she never did it for it would have not been half as bad. The light illuminated several paces before her and there she saw Alverio's

face and the dark smile on it. The eyes of the man scarred all forms of jeepers out of her for they were getting blood red.

The wand fell off her hand and she ran but there was no place she could run from someone that could see in the dark. She reached the forth floor screaming for help but there was no one. Sadly even Peeves weren't anywhere nearby. Alverio pursued with appetizing ferocity. He has always enjoyed the chase but it was time also to satisfy his hunger.

In just few seconds, he was behind her. He reached for her and grabbed her. She resisted as much an eleven year old could. She was sensing his breath on her neck and that was increasing her fear exponentially. Alverio's hunger grew to the point of total satisfaction. He turned her head exposing her neck and plunged his teeth in it.

The girl let, as one could describe it, a blood freezing scream and then became silent. They all become silent after that. Alverio saturated his hunger for that one was very tasty, fear being an important component. He drained her in minutes.

He let go of her lifeless body and raised his head up opening his mouth and letting go a sigh of satisfaction. Blood dripped from his orifice and fell on the girl's face but he barely noticed. Then he sat next to the body still rejoicing of the glorious moment when he sensed something. He heard definitely not only a hissing but a powerful one. He stood up at once taking defensive stance.

The hissing seemed to be coming from the walls. He pressed his ear against the wall and sensed something big slithering. As it got closer he finally recognized it. He pulled away from the wall like electric shock had hit him. He had no desire of facing that beast. There were very few that would dare do it.

He bent down, picked up the girl's body and threw it out the opened window. Unfortunately, she fell right in the branches of a tree but he had no time to change this as the hissing was very close. Alverio closed the other windows and jumped through the last one opened. He landed near the wall and made his way to the forest as quickly and as invisibly as possible.

He arrived just in time. His men informed him that the boy had appeared in the glade. They proceeded at all haste there. The boy

had indeed made his first and probably last mistake. They surrounded him and proceeded to him but unfortunately the young one had detected them. He was already on his feet, a wand in hand.

Alverio cursed under breath and shot a red beam at the boy that missed him only by an inch. The capturing nets were summoned once again but the boy was unbelievably quick in his reaction. He managed to destroy them before they had formed entirely.

"Surrender young wizard." – Alverio's deep hissing voice echoed throughout the glade. "You are surrounded and you're no match for us."

"Us being who?"

"You will find out soon enough." – Alverio smiled. The boy was insistent.

"Not soon enough, I want to know now." – The boy bellowed.

"Take him down." – Alverio commanded.

All his men opened fire. The tree behind the boy exploded but the boy evaded. The chase had begun again, Alverio thought. Unfortunately they did not have much time as this battle would for sure attract attention.

The boy was ducking spells but he was not quick enough and soon was hit. Alverio sensed his blood spill but then the boy did the unthinkable. He shouted something and Alverio and his men felt the effects almost at once. The sky was covered immediately with thunder clouds that produced a spell not seen used in almost four hundred years, yet alone by a boy of his age.

The chain lightening pinned all his men, including Alverio, to the ground. Alverio stood up quickly but had no time to react when he noticed the boy's wand pointed at his chest. He was hit hard by a lightening bolt and flew several meters away crashing into very sharp bushes cutting himself up in several places. His chest where the bolt struck was hurting like hell.

He got on his feet quickly and rejoined the battle but just in time to duck as the boy fired at them a fire ball of great intensity. This

unforeseen resistance angered his men and they placed the boy under a spell rain. They inflicted great damage but the boy was still fighting back. Soon it became clear to Alverio that the boy had lost the battle. He and his men moved victoriously towards him though he managed to surprise them one last time.

Alverio was certain of his victory when he heard the boy's shout – "Vortex Anima" and his blood froze. In an instant, the winds that were up there in the skies sped down to the earth and formed a mighty funnel that as almost as solid as a rock. It scooped all of them and hurled them far up in the skies.

They crashed into Hogwarts' defenses and most of his men were pulverized upon contact. Alverio survived as he landed on another. They were on the other side of the school's territories. Alverio saw no other choice but to call Count Vorkus for assistance. He was sure the wizards were alerted of their presence and only with increased forces could they overcome this obstacle.

Alverio and the surviving members returned to the gathering point. Lord Cornelius was not there only Vorkus. Alverio bowed to him the moment they landed.

"No boy, I see." – Vorkus commented.

"Matter's complicated." – Alverio replied and recounted the events of the unpredictable set of circumstances.

Vorkus' eyes narrowed. This was indeed unforeseeable. He had warned the ruling council that the boy despite being this young would be a problem. But Lord Cornelius' insistence on capturing the boy alive was maddening.

"Go to recover your strength in the village nearby." – Vorkus commanded. "Destroy it."

"Yes, Count Vorkus."

"In the meantime, Fea, go get some hunters. We are going to tear that place down once and for all." – He ordered.

Fea, the faithful lieutenant, bowed down in obedience and left.

Alverio and his hunters left for the village below the gathering point. It was time to once again rejoice. This time there will be no sneaking around. Alverio broke in the first house he laid his eyes upon, moved to the bedroom where some sleepy man was wondering what the noise was about and sunk his teeth in him. The wife ran down screaming but fell upon another and soon her screams subdued.

They moved like a terrible plague from house to house devouring all its inhabitants. Some tried to resist with guns and riffles but they were no match for the blood thirsty undead cohorts. All ended in under an hour. The village of five hundred was taken. Humans, they were never able to resist them. Of course, once they had realized what had come to them they tried using fire and wooden sticks but the hunters were exhausted from the unexpected resistance of the boy and were severely pissed so nothing managed to slow them down even for a moment. Satisfied and with restored strength, they returned to gathering point above the village.

More hunters have arrived there. Vorkus was getting ready. Alverio had sent two of his men to deliver some food to his master.

"The village has been destroyed, Master." – Alverio said bowing down.

"Why were not you as effective with the boy as you were with this village, ah, Alverio?" – Vorkus demanded.

"The villagers, my count, did not use Aerial Spells of Old on us." – Alverio replied.

"The boy is twelve years old. He's hardly a match even for a Death Eater or whatever wizard."

"It may appear this way, my count, but it isn't." – Alverio answered back. "This boy has indeed displayed unnatural maturity and his knowledge and ability to cast such complex spells is staggering. But he is now lying injured on the glade unless the wizards have found him and we are wasting time pointing fingers."

"Indeed," – Lord Cornelius had appeared. "You can't do anything right, Alverio."

"It is not as simple task as it appears milord." – Alverio objected.

"Excuses!" – Cornelius' voice thundered. "Were the villagers such a problem?"

"No, milord."

"Hugh, but a twelve year boy was?" – He hissed.

"There is something else, Milord." – Vorkus interrupted.

"Like?"

"There is a complication slithering in the school."

"I know, the Ancient beast." – Cornelius replied much to Vorkus' surprise. "I instructed that pathetic wizard to introduce it so it could create the necessary distraction for you to move freely but apparently it doesn't seem to have any effect as you have not fulfilled the task I sent you for."

"We are going now." – Vorkus said.

"Are you now?"

"Yes, Milord."

"And you expect the wizards to simply let you in?"

"No, they may resist." – Vorkus replied.

"We don't have sufficient numbers to storm a castle such as Hogwarts." – Cornelius cut off his enthusiasm.

"I can do it with the forces I've got." – Vorkus reassured.

"Really?" – A dark smile appeared on Cornelius. "Are you prepared to risk everything on this fool's move?"

"The boy will be ours whether the wizards want or not." – Vorkus replied adamantly.

"Very well, take your forces and proceed." – Cornelius ceded although he was certain that Vorkus will fail but he wanted to give him a chance nonetheless.

Vorkus' forces gathered – twenty highly trained hunters plus what was left of Alverio's men.

"We shall return with the boy." – Vorkus said and departed.

Cornelius remained for a little while before leaving himself. He was certain they will not come back. His clan was not ready to attack Hogwarts yet but soon he will be and then the wizards will get what they deserved – death at the hands of the very power that had helped all these years ago. The wizards ever since then did not hold on their part and all the clans cursed them for that. The time for retribution was approaching. They will pay.

Vorkus arrived on Hogwarts territory half an hour later. They proceeded through the gap in the defenses of the school and straight to the glade but there they did not find the boy not that he was expecting him to be there.

"Get ready." – Vorkus commanded.

They proceeded to the castle. As they reached it Vorkus froze in his steps. He had sensed danger ahead.

"Stop!" – He commanded raising his hand. His eyes pierced the dark and noticed just outside the tree line house elves something that was highly unusual. Soon he noticed they were not alone. Fifteen silhouettes were standing just outside his sight. "Arm yourselves!"

They proceeded cautiously forward. And just ten minutes later, they recognized the silhouettes. It was their oldest enemies. Their presence was not part of the plan. Vorkus understood quickly why the house elves were there. He had forgotten that these little creatures were never taken into account when it comes to building defenses around magical strongholds.

"Fire at will!" – Vorkus commanded and shot first at their enemies.

In a moment the entire forest line exploded in jets of lights. The battle has begun. Vorkus sensed and saw some of the school



teachers at the front gates of the establishment but had no time to worry about them.

"Count Vorkus, what an unexpected honor!"

Vorkus came face to face with someone he had hoped never to see.

"Lord Tenyra..." – He exclaimed. "It's high time we settle our accounts once and for all."

"Indeed, it has been five centuries since our last amiable encounter in the forest of Dean." – Lord Tenyra said.

Vorkus did not reply to this biting remark instead fired a greenish bolt at Tenyra who eluded swiftly the beam.

"We begin dark, ah?" – Tenyra commented while producing a set of inflamed balls and directed them at his opponent.

Vorkus took a step back, made a swirling motion with his wand and transformed the balls into sharp silvery blades and shot them back at the lord. Tenyra let something reminding of a sinister laugh filled with mockery while performing a rather complex move with his staff. The blades froze in mid area and turned into rain of hot lava that was directed back at Vorkus who had to erect a wall of ice. The lava hit the wall and starting fuming. Meanwhile, Tenyra used the time this had given him to cast a new spell. His staff made a circular move a dark vortex of thunder clouds.

The moment the wall dissipated, the vortex moved towards the taken off guard enemy. Vorkus had no time to respond. The dark vortex sucked him in and bolts of dark magic pierced his flesh inflicting several deep wounds. Vorkus screeched in pain but he was lucky as another hunter moved to protect his master forcing Tenyra to step back.

Vorkus emerged from the vortex severely exhausted but pissed beyond belief. He unleashed the dark fire. It is one of the most difficult spells to control. Within the fire, shapes of dark rose and fire began to gain strength. Vorkus, obviously, lost control of it and everything within its path was turned into ash.

But Tenyra knew how to counter this monstrosity. He escaped the range of the dark fire then directed his staff to the sky and commanded: "Tonittros Equi Procilla ama vetis elyndo" Rain clouds the likes of which anyone could imagine formed over the dark fire, a second later a curtain of heavy drops poured. The dark fire was surrounded and the shapes of fire lost their momentum, few seconds later it is all over. All those that were in the proximity of the spell were wet to the bones.

Vorkus stood stupefied. He had never seen anyone counter the Dark Fire spell but it seemed that the damned Necromancers have found a way after all. Unfortunately he had little time to ponder as Tenyra resumed his attack with dark ferocity. Dark magic bolts flew in his direction forcing him to dodge and duck. He managed however to erect a defensive shield blocking the effects of the bolts then commanded the grass to grow with an evil incantation and encompass his enemy and then shot another green beam at him.

But yet again he had misjudged his opponent. The Necromancers' knowledge in the art of magic was extensive and their power great. Tenyra was stuck indeed but he was far from defenseless. Tenyra deflected the green beam that exploded the nearby tree in darkish greenish flames falling in ashes.

"Crux eveo" – Tenyra whispered. A cross made of dark fumes formed before him and struck Vorkus straight into the chest thus paralyzing him on the spot.

"Evocare Ustoris" – This kind of spell no one at Vorkus' place would have expected. A dark silhouette formed from the burned ground. It was a spell of the Ancient times – Death Magic. The silhouette grew in size and as it reached the immobilized opponent suddenly a fiery sword appeared in its hand the light of which was blinding. It burned Vorkus' eyes and the more the thing was approaching so did his flesh though slowly.

Time appeared to have slowed down and everyone saw like in ultra slow motion the sword piercing Vorkus' heart. The screams Vorkus produced were beyond description as no being before him had screamed like he did. The moment the sword was fully plunged into his heart, the silhouette encompassed Vorkus and after a second suspended in eternity Vorkus' body was reduced to ashes. An

unnatural wind blew and the ashes scattered before vanishing completely.

The death of their leader managed only to enrage them. Vorkus' hunters attacked with animal ferocity and the battle became uglier.

Thant was fighting one of the hunters going by the name of Lovett. He was an elder among his kind, very strong and powerful but he had met his match in the face of Thant Solmyr. Both were exchanging spell so quickly that their moves were barely visible and for someone watching on the sidelines they would be for certain blurry.

At one point, Lovett managed to push hard Thant who lost his balance and fell on one knee to the ground. Lovett used this moment and attacked but did not hit Thant. Princess had appeared before her master and the spell hit her. Unbelievable rage poured into Thant. He quickly got to his feet and the strength of the spell he used shot Lovett dozen of feet backwards. Thant then knelt down to check on Princess.

"She's barely breathing," – Thant said to himself. "Pius Restitutio." The little body was encompassed by ray of pure light. Princess' breathing normalized almost at once. "Never scare me like that." – Thant said. "Now return to the castle and rest."

"But master," – Princess tried to protest.

"I command thee." – Thant left no space for contradiction.

Princess bowed and vanished. Thant turned his attention to Lovett. So far they have been playing something like a game but now Thant was angered. Lovett might be good among his people but he had made the mistake of angering a Necromancer and this had bad consequences.

Lovett came near and fired a few spells that Thant simply dodged.

"Mens moris" – Thant barely whispered. The effect was immediate. Lovett froze in his steps. Horrifying pain crossed through his mind. Not even the torturing mind spell could produce such immediate paralyzing effect. "Chronos deleter" Lovett felt his will to fight back subduing. "Exancio Vitalis Vigoris" Of all the spells Thant could have

used this was the one Lovett simply could not conceive a Necromancer ever use. The effect was immediate and extremely painful but Lovett sensed his life force being sucked away and his state of lower initiative and mind hindrance he had no way of countering it or avoiding it. His life energy was drained and he fell dead on the grass.

The rest of the Necromancers saw this as a sign to finish the battle quickly and decisively. The level of the spells they started to use became too much for their opponents though they were fighting back. But when Thant and Tenyra rejoined the battle things became even uglier than before for the Necromancers began using long forgotten Dark Magic spells of destructive nature. The grounds around the forest transformed into polished dark rock.

Their opponents, at least those that were still alive, retreated though most of the Necromancers pursued them. The battle continued to the every edge of Hogwarts territories. Then everything went silent. Only two hunters of the Vorkus' group managed to return to the gathering point where Cornelius waited. One of them managed only to deliver the news of failure before falling dead while the other one lived only a day longer before joining his friend in eternity.

Cornelius had not expected them to return with the promised prize but he was surprised of the level of resistance the wizards had shown. The ones that returned however did not mention they were fighting their oldest enemy. The second survivor simply could not speak and entering his mind as Cornelius discovered was not possible so he did not get the details of the battle. Eventually he learnt the truth and great rage took him over.

The Necromancers pursuing the enemy returned and gathered around Lords Tenyra and Thant.

"Only two managed to escape, Milord."

"But they will not reach far." – Another added.

"Anyway, the Vampires are defeated." – Tenyra concluded.

"For now, they are but they will return." – Thant remarked.

"Why were they here in the first place?" – Tenyra asked.

"They were after Nimbus. They had pursued him since day one." – Thant explained. "They have managed somehow to drill through the school's defenses."

"We have to reinforce them." – Tenyra concluded.

"I doubt the wizards will let us." – Frya commented.

"No one is going to ask the wizards." – Thant said.

"Thant, we have to implement a restriction for the house elves too. They saw with us." – Tenyra remarked.

"I know but this one will be hard."

"Why?" – Frya asked.

"It will be because there a few hundred working at the school plus others that do visit." – Tenyra replied.

"We have no choice but to place the restrictions anyway. We shall scout the ones in Hogwarts plus a few others and place the exception ward on them." – Thant said.

"It is agreed then."

"Wizards." – A Necromancer warned.

Professor Dumbledore and the rest of the teachers were indeed heading towards them.

"Revert to human form." – Tenyra commanded. "They must not know who we are."

The Necromancers obeyed and the moment the wizards got near them they were back to their fleshy self.

"Professor Dumbledore!" – Tenyra greeted. "It has been a long time."

Albus stopped to look at the person talking to him and after few seconds recognized him.

"Lord Jacques Tenyra," – Albus replied. "It is a pleasure to see you again."

"The feeling is mutual."

"What happened here?" – Professor McGonagall demanded noticing the polished rocky ground.

"Some spells went out of control." – Tenyra replied politely.

"Out of control?" – McGonagall repeated frantically.

"It does tend to happen from time to time."

"I trust that wasn't the professor's question Tenyra." – Thant said.

"Oh!"

"Do you have an idea who they were?" – Albus asked.

"They were Dark Wizards belonging to an old order – the Nefastus." – Thant replied withholding Albus' scanning gaze. "They have hated the normals such as you and me for a long time and tonight they had managed to penetrate Hogwarts' defenses."

"How had they managed to comprise our defenses?" – Snape demanded.

"Indeed, this is very disturbing news." – Albus agreed.

"They had used House Elves, which is why you need to upgrade your defenses preventing house elves of being able to apparate and disapparate within the premises of the school." – Tenyra explained ceasing the opportunity this question provided.

"Of course, making exception for the house elves currently employed at Hogwarts." – Thant added.

"What about those employed by other wizards?" – McGonagall asked.

"No, they must not be allowed. The risk will be too great." – Thant countered.

"I agree." – Albus said thoughtfully.

Thant of course had in mind of allowing at least another three of being able to pass through and those were his. Harry was still in the infirmary meaning that Casper and Kaiser were still under his command so there was no choice and Princess of course had to be part of that too.

Thant left Serena to observe when the defenses against house elves were to take effect so to include the three mischievers. The rest of the Necromancers vacated Hogwarts' grounds though the teachers did forget to ask how they had penetrated the school's defenses.

October came with the colds that only Madam Pomfrey's pepperup potions could take care of although there were side effects such as the students' ears would smoke for several hours after taking it.

Harry was still in the infirmary recovering from the encounter at the Battle Glade, as Ron came to call it. Cassie and Xsi were at Harry's bedside every morning while Alamar was taking the lunch time and Ron and Hermione were taking over in the evenings.

They were all worried as the healers weren't sure whether he would be able to recover. All that could be done for him was done though the rest was up to Harry and a good dose of luck.

The capers, whomever's turn was, were making everything possible to get through to him as the healers had said that familiar voices might help. Tonight, Ron and Hermione had the intention of staying only for a while as they had a lot of homeworks but in the end decided to stay longer. Ron had decided to talk about Quidditch as he and Harry liked it so much though his news weren't that good.

"...George said that the Slytherins are indeed a terrible obstacle as with the new Nimbus 2001's they are unstoppable. Oliver's devising plans after plans but he has nothing to counter the superiority of the brooms with. So far Fred and George had proposed million ways how to get the entire Slytherin team sick or something but that won't change much as we would have to play against someone else so

will be back at square one and even worse. Cassie, I think, is trying to find some book in order to curse their brooms but Hermione thinks that even if she does find what she is looking for it is doubtful she would be able to perform the curse."

"Yes, that will be bad." – Hermione confirmed rising her head from the homework. "And even if she succeeds she will be expelled afterwards."

"At least, she's generating ideas."

"Oh, yes, they're so great. This is the bad thing about this game it turns people one against the other." – Hermione said and continued writing.

"It is nothing less but good health." – Alamar said as he came in. "Competition is indeed healthy."

"Pluto, what are you doing here?" – Ron asked.

"Yes, you shouldn't be here." – Hermione agreed.

"Yeah, well, I couldn't sleep so I snuck out."

"You are not the only one." – Xsi added.

"Trivia!"

"Hey guys!" – Cassie came in too.

"What if you get caught?" – Hermione asked. "We'll lose the right to come and visit."

"You worry too much, Athena." – Cassie replied. "No change, ah?"

"None." – Ron sighed.

"Well, we should all be glad he actually survived that ordeal at all." – Trivia noted.

"Yeah," – Cassie sighed deeply. "I'm not even trying to imagine how many he must have been fighting and what on Earth pushed him to do so?"



"Maybe, he had no choice, sis." – Trivia said.

"I guess so."

"I don't think he would rush into a fight when he is outnumbered." – Alamar shared.

"But this is the forth time someone tried really hard to get rid of him." – Cassie voiced what had been bothering her.

"I can think of one – The Dark Lord." – Alamar said.

"Not necessarily," – Ron countered. "Though he is the most likely suspect."

"Meaning what exactly – who else would want to kill him?" – Trivia asked.

"I don't know but the things that were after us did not strike as the Death Eaters." – Ron replied.

"You don't have to forget one other element, Trivia," – Hermione joined in. "Whoever they were they managed to penetrate Hogwarts' defenses."

"True," – Ron agreed. "And so far the Death Eaters have never succeeded in doing so."

"I know the teachers are very concerned." – Trivia nodded. "Professor McGonagall has become very pale."

"And speaking of pale," – Alamar remembered. "How is your sister Ron? She's been looking very pale lately."

"I don't know. Percy thinks it's the season. It should have seen what happened when he gave her Madam Pomfrey's potion." – Ron replied.

"I imagine the effect would be that her hair is on fire." – Cassie chuckled.

"Yeah," – Ron laughed.

"You know," – Alamar said. "The other day I was returning from the Quidditch after watching the Gryffindors practice and bumped into Filch. He was in a rather foul mood."

"I imagine he gave detention for bringing mud into the castle." – Trivia guessed.

"Oh, he tried but I got away thanks to Sir Nicholas and Peeves." – Alamar said.

"What? How?" – Cassie asked intrigued.

"Well, I entered into the castle and there was Filch. He wasn't happy and I had to follow him to his sanctum of dungeon chains." – Alamar recounted. "This man is truly paranoid and totally loony. Anyway, he sat down looking for some paper to enter my offense when there was a loud bang upstairs, which the oiled lamp to rattle. Without a second thought, Filch darted off.

I used the time to look around. There were a few wooden cabinets filled with files carrying names of the students with bad behavior. There was a large pile with files for Remus Lupin, Sirius Black and James Potter."

"The apple doesn't fall far the tree they say." – Trivia remarked.

"Look, who's talking?" – Hermione exclaimed and all laughed.

"Go on, Pluto." – Ron said.

"This is very true, Trivia, but there was an almost equally large pile with Ron's brothers and you two, well, maybe, as big as for the others but just as impressive. Anyway, I continued to look around and my look fell on something on Filch's desk. It was an envelope, which read – KwickSpell. I have to say it was highly intriguing.

I took the envelope, opened and started reading, "Feel left out of the magic world? Find yourself excuses for not performing spells? Ever been taunted for your woeful wand work? This is the answer – Kwickspell. Kwickspell is a new, tested and proved quick-result, easy-learn course. Madam Y Cottles says: I had no memory for incantations but with Kwickspell course I'm now the center of

attention at parties and family reunions! Mr. Warry of Kentuburry says: My wife used to sneer at feeble charms but now after having completed the Kwickspell course I successfully turned her into a yak. Thank you, Kwickspell!"

Imagine my surprise and it finally everything started to make sense. This explains why Filtch has such hatred for the students."

"You mean to say jealousy." – Cassie corrected him. "He's a squib."

"Yeah, well, Filtch returned with a victory smile on his smug face. Apparently, Peeves had smashed the Vanishing cabinet, which Filtch considered to be very valuable. He then noticed the envelope and turned to me.

'Did you read it?'

'Read what?' – I asked though I did notice I hadn't put in its exact place.

'If I'd thought you read my private – not that it is mine – for a friend – be it as it may – but... Very well – go, you're free. But don't breathe a word about – not that – however; if you didn't read then...never mind be gone I have to write Peeves up.'

He looked madder than his usual. But he did let me go and without any detention. I appeared upstairs and Sir Nicolas emerged from a wall.

'Did it work?' – He asked and I looked at him with awe.

'You did this?'

'I convinced Peeves to smash over Filtch's office, yes.'

'Well, it did work. Thanks! How can I repay you?'

'Well, it doesn't matter. I'm just glad it worked.' – He was not very convincing though. He was holding a letter of kind and looked a bit gloomy about it.

'What's that in your hand?' – I asked intrigued.

'Oh, nothing,' – He replied trying to hide it but then exploded angrily, 'But who would think that being hit with a blunt axe forty-five times doesn't qualify for the Headless Hunt.'

'Oh, you haven't been accepted.'

'No, I mean nobody wished more than I do to have been done quickly and cleanly but unfortunately no, not mention it would have reduced the pain and the ridicule. However,' – Nick unfolded the letter again and started reading, 'Dear applicant, we can only accept those members whose heads are completely separated from their shoulders otherwise they can't participate into the hunt activities such as Horseback Head-Juggling and Head Polo. So, I regret to inform you that you do not qualify as you are only nearly headless. Yours truly, Sir Patrick Delaney-Podmore.'

Nick looked really upset. 'Who would think that an inch of skin that holds my head would be called nearly headless? I mean I'm headless just because of this little infringement but apparently not enough for Mister totally beheaded Podmore.'

'I'm sorry, Nick.' – I tried to make him feel better. 'Maybe, it is for the best. I can't imagine how fun would it be to play Polo with your head. We like you the way you are.'

'So is there something I can do to help though I can't really see why you would want to part of that group as you can easily form one of your own.'

'Thank you, young Darkstone. You're right. Who needs to be like them? But I guess I would be honored if...but no it's too much to ask...'

'What?'

'Well, I would feel honored if you'd come...this Halloween is my five hundredth death-day. And I will be having a party down in the dungeons so I'd be honored if you were to come, the rest of the Capers too, of course.'

'Sure, why not?'

He was delighted then floated away and I was on my way." – Alamar finished.

"So you invited us to the Nick's death celebration instead of the delightful feast we could be expecting for Halloween, is this what you're saying?" – Cassie asked rising both eyebrows.

"Essentially, yes," – Alamar swallowed.

"We'll come to that when Halloween comes along." – Trivia intervened.

"Anyway," – Cassie said. "The teachers have been spending their time lately upgrading the school's defenses. The other day, I saw some guys from the ministry."

"And many parents are demanding to know why but I guess they have decided not to mention what had occurred on the Battle Glade." – Trivia said.

"They should have though." – Hermione said.

"Yeah, well, they did not want to spread panic." – Alamar injected. "It would remind of the days of the Dark one and no one wants to go there just yet."

"But we are in danger." – Hermione stressed out.

"The teachers are taking all the necessary precautions. I don't think these intruders will get another chance." – Alamar said.

"That didn't stop them the first time." – Hermione insisted.

"From the looks of all, it seems they know how they had managed to achieve it." – Cassie remarked. "So I guess I'll agree with Pluto, we are safe for now."

"We'll see." – Hermione said and plunged once more into her homework.

"What are you writing anyway?" – Cassie asked.

"I'm writing the essay for Professor...."

"History of Magic." – Ron interrupted.

"Oh, him." – Cassie exclaimed.

"Ron, you should be writing it too." – Hermione reminded.

"I'll do it tomorrow." – Ron yawned.

"You should all be in bed." – Someone said.

They all turned around and saw Professor Dumbledore in his night gown.

"Professor Dumbledore!" – They all exclaimed.

"We just wanted to keep Harry company." – Alamar explained.

"I can see that, Mr. Darkstone." – Albus smiled. "You've doing it every day. You are good friends but you should be all in bed."

"Actually, we were thinking of moving permanently here until he wakes up." – Xsi said.

"I doubt Madam Pomfrey would agree." – Albus shared. "Alright, you have my permission for tonight to remain here."

"Thank you, Professor Dumbledore." – Cassie said relieved.

"Professor?" – Alamar said.

"Yes, Mr. Darkstone."

"Did you uncover the identities of those who attacked Harry?"

Everyone turned their attention to Dumbledore even Hermione left alone her homework and looked up.

"Were they Death Eaters?" – Ron asked fearing the answer.

"No, they were not." – Albus replied.

"Then who were they?" – Xsi asked.

Albus sighed. It seemed they wouldn't rest until they know. Of course, he had his suspicions as he suspected Lord Solmyr was not telling the truth. He had been definitely hiding something about the identities of the attackers but for now his explanation was accepted by all.

"We believe Harry was attacked by the Nefastus." – He replied.

"The who?" – Ron and Hermione explained.

"The Nefastus – this is highly curious." – Cassie said and looked at Dumbledore who did not seem to believe a word of what he had just told them.

"But possible." – Alamar added looking knowingly at Cassie and Xsi.

"Well, good night!" – Albus wished and left the infirmary.

"Would someone let me in?" – Hermione asked looking at the other three.

"The Nefastus are an old order of dark wizards but they haven't been active for more than two centuries. And I find it highly unlikely they would come to Hogwarts just to chase Harry." – Cassie shared.

"Yes, they probably cheered when he knocked down the Dark Lord." – Alamar agreed.

"I think something else is going on." – Cassie said. "Even Dumbledore doesn't believe a word of what he just told us."

"How would you know?" – Ron asked.

"I have eyes, Tyr and I use them."

"We have officially a mystery on our hands." – Xsi said.

"And I guess – we'll get to the bottom of it." – Hermione added.

"You're as right as usual Athena!" – Xsi smiled.

"Capers to the rescue!" – Alamar said.

"Dark Forces, watch out, we are coming for you!" – Cassie cheered.

And don't forget to review. It only takes a couple of minutes. Thank you!

Lordheaven



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